The New Criterion

March 1991

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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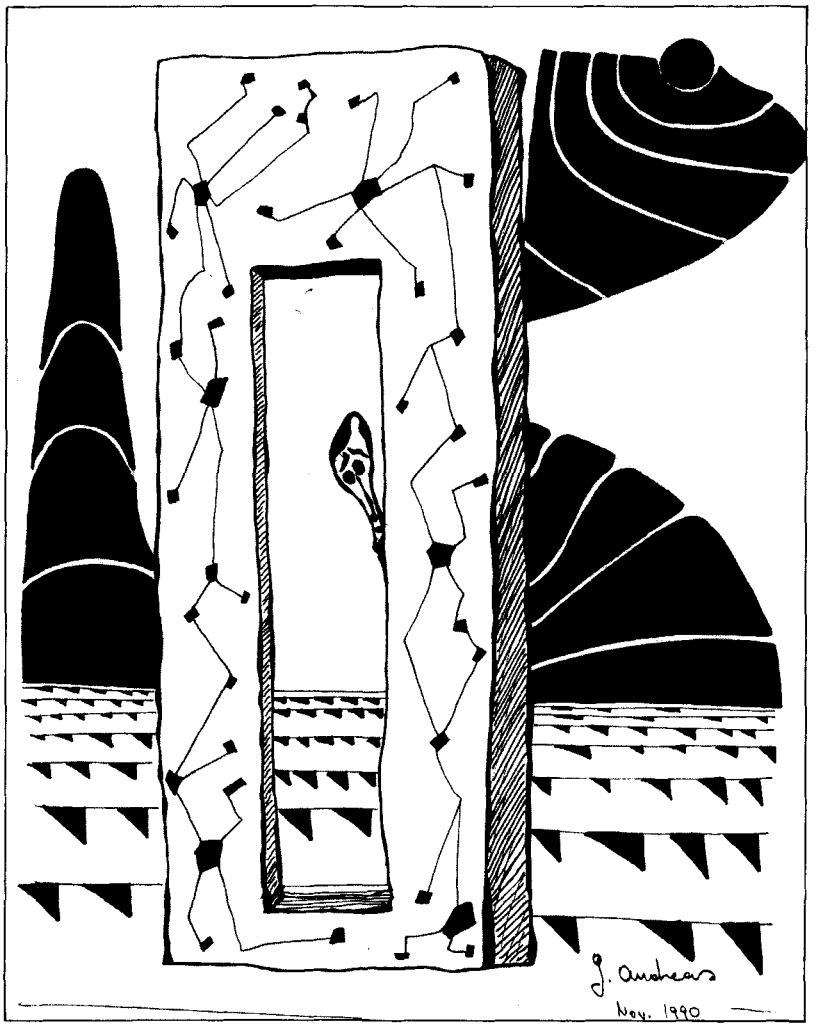

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The New Criterion *March 1991*

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Bruce Bawer's most recent book is *Diminishing Fictions* (Graywolf Press).
Christopher Carduff reviewed the memoirs of Charles Scribner, Jr., for our February issue.
Mark Falcoff is Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.
Moira Hodgson reviewed Suzanne Farrell's *Holding On to the Air* for our October issue.
Roger Kimball's book, *Tenured Radicals*, will soon be published in paperback by Harper-Collins.
Samuel Lipman's new essay collection, *Arguing for Music, Arguing for Culture*, is published by David R. Godine.
Donald Lyons is the regular theater critic for *The New Criterion*.
Dana Mack wrote on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Music for a While" series for our January issue.
Jed Perl's art chronicle, *Gallery Going: Four Seasons in the Art World*, will be published in May by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
Robert Richman is the editor of *The Direction of Poetry*, published by Houghton Mifflin.
Vasily Rudich teaches Classics at Yale University.
Deborah Solomon's biography of Joseph Cornell will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
Elizabeth Spires's latest collection of poems is *Annonciade* (Viking).
Karen Wilkin's monograph on Kenneth Noland was recently published by Rizzoli.

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Notes & Comments: March 1991

"Practicing social change"

What do our major universities nowadays look for when the search committees set out on their quest for an outstanding candidate to fill the position of full professor in an English department? A record of distinction in literary scholarship? A reputation for high achievement in literary criticism? A well-earned name for devotion to the teaching of literature, and a solid history of success in that endeavor? Certainly not. None of these (outmoded?) criteria now counts for much with the current breed of academic decision-makers. What is looked for—and usually found, too—is politics. Or, to be more precise, politically correct politics.

A case in point is the recent appointment of Gayatri Spivak to a full professorship in the Department of English at Columbia College. According to a report in *The Columbia Spectator*, the main campus newspaper, the appointment of Professor Spivak, who now serves on the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh, represented the culmination of "an extensive search for a feminist theorist" by the Columbia College English Department. No pretense was made about any literary credentials for this senior post in what was once one of the most distinguished departments of English in the nation. According to the *Spectator*'s report, "Spivak's specialties include feminist theory, post-structuralist theory, and post-colonial culture."

Needless to say, this appointment was enthusiastically endorsed by the current "chair" of the department, Professor Joan Ferrante, who is quoted in the *Spectator* as follows: "What is exceptional is that [Spivak] works not only in women's studies, but also post-colonialism. She brings a dimension of [to?] women's studies that we haven't had before."

It was left to Martha Howell, the director of the Center on Women and Gender Studies at Columbia, to underscore the unabashedly political character of the appointment in her statement to the *Spectator*:

> Although Spivak's field of study is often esoteric, Howell said, her devotion to the practical application of feminism is accessible to everyone at Columbia.
>
> "Despite the fact that she's a huge theorist, she's absolutely committed to practicing social change," she said.

Practicing social change: This is indeed the name of the game these days, and this is what this high appointment to the faculty of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia is really about.

One of the best comments we have seen on this now widespread practice of basing aca-

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demic appointments on politically correct ideology was John Searle's in *The New York Review of Books* for February 14. Searle is a distinguished professor of philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley, and on December 6 he published an essay in the *Review* called "The Storm Over the University." Responding to a letter from Gerald Graff that took issue with this essay, especially as it applied to Professor Graff's well-known defense of the politicization of the teaching of literature and the humanities, Professor Searle wrote:

> The idea that the curriculum should be converted to any partisan political purposes is a perversion of the ideal of the university. The objective of converting the curriculum into an instrument of social transformation (leftist, rightist, centrist, or whatever) is the very opposite of higher education. It is characteristic of the major totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century—leftist and rightist—that they try to make precisely such a conversion and the result is invariably the end of higher education as such, and its replacement by a mixture of political indoctrination and technical training.
>
> Furthermore, for an individual professor to think that his own "particular courses" should become leftist "instruments" of social transformation is a violation of his obligations both to his students and to the institution, because the terms of his agreement with both are intellectual rather than political.

This is precisely the kind of violation that Gayatri Spivak's appointment to Columbia College represents—the kind of violation that is now embraced as routine academic policy. And by the way, Professor Graff, whose defense of these violations in the name of politics prompted Professor Searle's comments, has also lately reaped new benefits from this politically correct position. Later this year he moves from Northwestern University, where he is currently the John C. Shaffer Professor of Humanities and English, to an appointment as full professor in the Department of English at the University of Chicago.

Exit MASS MOCA

It looks as if the farce known as MASS MOCA is finally over, a casualty of its own inanition and a symbol of the spendthrift ambitions—long on hype and swagger and short on substance—that characterized so many of the excesses of the contemporary-art scene in the 1980s. MASS MOCA—the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art—never actually existed, of course, as anything but a bureaucratic and public-relations fantasy. The likelihood of its ever existing in palpable and functioning form, moreover, was always exceedingly remote. Yet for several years the illusion of its viability persisted in the press, in certain circles of government, and in the overreaching imagination of the people who dreamed up this bizarre project, which promised to bring to one of the most woebegone areas of the depressed New England economy the biggest (in size) and most parochial (in aesthetic outlook) museum of contemporary art in the world.

MASS MOCA never was a viable idea. What this chimera was supposed to consist of was the transformation of an abandoned twenty-eight-building factory complex in the town of North Adams, Massachusetts, into a world-class museum of mostly 1960s Minimalist art. The scenario called for this elephantine enterprise to be the joint venture of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the state of Massachusetts. The cost was projected at around $77 million just to open the doors—among many other problems, a good deal of toxic waste would have to be removed from the site—with $35 million coming from the "Massachusetts Miracle" economy of the then governor, Michael S. Dukakis.

Remember the Massachusetts Miracle? It was to the political economy of New England what MASS MOCA has been to the world of contemporary-art museums—a pub-

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licist's invention masquerading as a proud public achievement. There never was any Massachusetts Miracle; there was only subterfuge and debt. There never was any MASS MOCA, either; there was only smoke and mirrors. The vast spaces of those converted factory buildings in North Adams were to be filled with loans of Sixties Minimalist art—Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, et al.—from the collection of Count Panza di Biumo, and we were asked to believe that the audiences that flock to Tanglewood each summer to listen to the symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms would be eager to spend their daylight hours gorging themselves on Judd boxes and Flavin fluorescent-light tubes. And all the while the economically beleaguered citizens of North Adams were told that this fantasy project would bring prosperity to their town, with mobs of free-spending tourists filling not only the mammoth museum but the motels, the restaurants, the shops, the luxury apartments, etc., that would be built as part of the deal.

The principal beneficiary of this fantasy deal turned out to be Count Panza, who sold, not lent, a sizable part of his Minimalist collection to the Guggenheim Museum. (To pay for it, the Guggenheim had to sell a Kandinsky, a Chagall, and a Modigliani out of its permanent collection, so the New York art public ended up footing at least part of the bill for the MASS MOCA dream scenario.) Then it turned out that the collection acquired by the Guggenheim from Count Panza wasn't entirely real, either. Many of the acquired "works" consisted of sketches on paper that had never been made, and couldn't be made without the permission and supervision of the artists, which were not likely to be forthcoming. In the end, the Guggenheim Museum refused to go along with the fantasy project, the state of Massachusetts proved to be bankrupt, and MASS MOCA just another Eighties art-world debacle.

The author of the debacle—Thomas Krens, who came into the directorship of the Guggenheim Museum with the promise of this mega-Guggenheim branch museum in North Adams—has come out of it pretty well, too. He is now busily at work selling the idea of other Guggenheim outpost branches in Austria, Italy, Japan, and—well, who knows where? Another collaborator in the MASS MOCA dream project—David Ross, the former director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston who served on the MASS MOCA Cultural Planning Commission—has come out of this debacle with something, too. He got the directorship of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. So two of New York's most important museums of contemporary art are now under the leadership of the men who brought us the MASS MOCA fantasy—yet another example, perhaps, of nothing succeeding like failure.

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The assault on the museums

by Hilton Kramer

The political thought police have now come to the American art museum. For some years they have been making their presence felt in the museum world in numerous ways, demanding—and usually getting—concessions and preferments in the name of gender, race, ethnicity, and the many other items that constitute the current agenda of multiculturalism, "diversity," and politically correct ideas. But the damage to aesthetic standards remained, for the most part, limited in scope as far as the mainstream activities of most of our museums are concerned. Museum administrators might be quick to surrender the pages of exhibition catalogues to the new political orthodoxy—as they did, in the 1980s, with the Courbet retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum, for example, and the Richard Serra show at the Museum of Modern Art—but the exhibitions themselves were mounted with a minimum of political distortion. The signs of a growing political militancy and of a liberal tendency to succumb to its imperatives were already plentiful, to be sure—and they were proving to be increasingly costly to the museums—but with the exception of two principal areas of museological activity, politics had not yet succeeded in capsizing the programs of our major institutions. The situation was getting worse by the day, but it had not yet become the kind of catastrophe that had overtaken the humanities departments in our colleges and universities.

The two principal exceptions to this development in the museum world were (1) the entire field of contemporary art, which was coming to play an ever larger role in the affairs of a great many museums; and (2) that whole congeries of programs, publications, symposia, entertainments, classes, and workshops that goes by the name of "education" in the museums. It was in these two areas of museum work that the new political orthodoxy scored its initial victories and quickly acquired an immense, transfiguring influence. The reasons are anything but obscure. A good deal of the most fashionable new art of the 1980s was, in one way or another, openly "activist" and political in character. It shunned aesthetic issues in favor of ideological advocacy, and this kind of art met with a prompt and enthusiastic response in the museums and the art market, which were now more eager than ever to embrace whatever was guaranteed to be chic and "enlightened"—which is to say, politically correct—in contemporary art. The response of the museums to this development was scarcely distinguishable from that of the media, which the curators of contemporary art came more and more to worship, envy, and emulate. For the new breed of curatorial hustlers and their patrons among the dealers and collectors, an interest in artistic standards had come to seem outmoded, reactionary, and certainly not fun, and they were supported in this view by the critics who readily consigned the concept of "quality" to the dustheap of history so that the new (political)

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standards would prevail with unchallenged authority.

As for the enterprise that passes for "education" in most of our museums, this had largely become a scene of intellectual disgrace long before the political thought police arrived to transform it into a sanctuary for propaganda and indoctrination. In this area, it was often a case of politics filling an intellectual void. The last thing one can expect to receive from the educational program of an American art museum today is an informed and disinterested course of instruction in the mysteries and glories of a great work of art. The whole notion of connoisseurship—of learning to distinguish the qualities of one work of art from another, and thus to acquire a knowledge of what a work of art is and of what its particular attributes and powers consist of, especially in relation to other works of art of its kind—this whole approach to the understanding of art is now deemed to be indefensibly elitist. It stands opposed to the doctrine of "diversity," which requires us to believe that distinctions of value and achievement in art are nothing but a political racket designed to protect the interests of white male heterosexual artists in the West.

Forgotten, or at least discarded, in this assault on distinctions of value and achievement is the very purpose that the institution of the art museum was designed to serve —the purpose of distinguishing and preserving what informed judgment found to be the best in art, the highest accomplishments of their kind. This was the aesthetic and cultural ideal the art museum was created to uphold. That it did not always uphold this ideal without error or misjudgment does nothing to diminish the importance or the value of the ideal itself. And the fact is, the historical record abundantly vindicates the principal judgments that have been made about the artistic achievements of the past. New knowledge, new discoveries, new ideas inevitably modify these judgments and lead to revisions of taste and value, but it is the function of such revisions to serve this basic ideal more faithfully, not to topple it and lay waste its efficacy and integrity. Implicit in this ideal *is* an elitist belief that in art, as in other branches of human endeavor, some things *are* better than others—that there *are* highs and lows in the accomplishments of mind and imagination—and that it is the function of the art museum as an institution to aid us in understanding this distinction and in making the highest of these accomplishments a permanent part of our existence.

It is precisely this ideal and the kind of aesthetic intelligence essential to its realization that is now under attack from the political thought police. Taking their cues from the successful assault mounted by their ideological allies on the study of the arts and the humanities in the college and university classrooms of the nation, these militant advocates of the new political orthodoxy have accelerated the campaign to add the major art museums to their already impressive list of conquests. To judge by some recent developments, they are once again supported by their friends in the media in this effort to install the Big Brother agenda of multiculturalism, "diversity," and politically correct ideas as the only permissible program for the museums. And we are not speaking here of an occasional exhibition or an "outreach" department or some marginal appointments —the sops by means of which the liberal leadership of our museums has attempted in the past to placate and accommodate political demands regarded by their professional staffs as inimical to the highest functions and standards of their institutions. We are talking about radical change—a virtual cultural revolution—in the kind of programs and staffing and fundamental values that determine the very nature of the art museum and its role in the life of culture and society.

In this regard, the year began with a blast in the Sunday edition of *The Boston Globe* that was nothing less than a declaration of war against the city's principal cultural institutions. [1] Under a banner headline that read

1 "The Fine Arts: A World without Color," by Patti Hartigan and Diane E. Lewis; *The Boston Globe*, "Lifestyles" section, January 6, 1991, pages 29-35.

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"The Fine Arts: A World without Color," the *Globe* devoted the better part of seven full pages to Boston's major arts organizations, with the Museum of Fine Arts heading the list, charging them with various crimes against the new multiculturalist code and warning of dire political consequences if the "cultural diversity" agenda was not adopted by these institutions promptly and comprehensively. Also under attack in this special section of the Sunday paper was the Boston Symphony Orchestra—the issue there being, of course, "concert programming beyond the Eurocentric tradition," in addition to hiring practices—and other performing arts organizations; but the brunt of the assault was directed against the Museum of Fine Arts, which was identified in the second paragraph of the lead article as an institution that "continues to reflect the values and Eurocentric art traditions of the city's elite."[2]

I see nothing wrong with museums in our society concentrating on "Eurocentric art traditions"—they represent, after all, some of the greatest achievements of our civilization—but the truth of the matter is that the Museum of Fine Arts has never, in this century at least, limited its interests to European and American art, which is what is meant by "Eurocentric" in this indictment. Long before it took any serious interest in the modern art of the Western world, the Museum of Fine Arts acquired one of the finest collections of Asian art in the country. Its holdings in Indian sculpture are justly famous, and the curator largely responsible for assembling it (and much else in the museum's collections)—the late Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947)—was a greatly esteemed figure, a scholar, connoisseur, and philosopher who was as much of an authority on the medieval art of the West as on the aesthetic and cultural achievements of Asia.

Indeed, if the word had not now been turned into a degrading political bludgeon by these Left-liberal yahoos, Coomaraswamy might even be said to have been one of the preeminent "multicultural" art scholars of his time, and he played as great a role in shaping the history of this museum as anyone who ever served on its staff. Moreover, he was brought to the museum by one of those Boston Brahmins so despised by the authors of the *Globe*'s attack—Denman W. Ross, a patron of the museum who was himself an eminent connoisseur and collector—in order to establish the first sub-department of Indian art in an American museum.[3] But this is not the kind of achievement that these political hacks now have in mind when they speak of multiculturalism and "diversity." They mean, quite simply, affirmative-action programs that would make racial and other quotas mandatory in staff appointments, board membership, exhibitions, acquisitions, and every other division and activity of the institution, and regardless of what this might mean for the degradation of professional standards.

The truth is, neither these "activists" nor the authors of the *Globe*'s attack give a damn about the quality of the museum's programs or its staff so long as both can be coerced into conforming to a politically correct agenda. They aren't interested in artistic distinction even for their own constituents; they want a cultural revolution that will bring everything down to a level where the very idea of artistic distinction is politically anathema. Seeing every white male face, whether on the curatorial staff, in the board room, or among the artists represented in the museum's galleries, as a candidate for replacement, they are as ignorant of the history and character of the institutions they assault as they are of the art they clearly know and care nothing about. Yet they are very much on the march now,

2 This special section was followed up, in the *Globe* of January 11, by a long lead editorial entitled "The Arts Must Seek Diversity," which intensified the paper's attack on what it called "such elitist citadels as the Museum of Fine Arts and the Boston Symphony Orchestra."

3 See the two volumes of Coomaraswamy's *Selected Papers*, edited by Roger Lipsey, and Lipsey's biography, *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work*, all published in 1978 in the Bollingen Series by Princeton University Press.

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and the museum's leadership seems no better able to defend itself—or indeed, to mount the necessary counter-assault—than their counterparts in the academy.

Two weeks after *The Boston Globe*'s all-out declaration of war on this front, *The Washington Post* fired a salvo in the same direction. This was a long article in the Sunday "Outlook" section called "Culture in Black and White: Why Don't Washington's Arts Institutions Reflect Our Diversity?"[4] Its author was a wealthy and powerful figure on the Washington political-cultural scene—Peggy Cooper Cafritz, co-founder of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, chairman emeritus of the D.C. Commission on the Arts, chairman of the Cultural Education Committee of the Smithsonian Institution, and a well-known promoter of Left-liberal causes.

It is Mrs. Cafritz's belief that the social pathologies now afflicting the black underclass in the city of Washington—she mentions drugs and homelessness, but I assume she must also mean criminal violence and sexual promiscuity, though there is no mention of them—are primarily what it pleases her to call "a cultural problem." Of the children and adolescents who are the casualties of these pathologies, Mrs. Cafritz says that "their culture has been taken from them—unrecognized and undervalued by the larger world." It is therefore, she insists, the duty of Washington's great art museums, as well as the city's other major arts institutions, to remedy the situation. Not only are the National Gallery of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum, the National Museum of American Art, and the Corcoran Gallery called upon to solve this immense problem, which no public or private agency has yet made much headway in reversing in any city in the country, but Mrs. Cafritz goes on to cite particular arts organizations—among them, the Phillips Gallery and the Washington Opera—for what she calls particularly "glaring failures" in this endeavor.

And what does Mrs. Cafritz have in mind as the solution to the problems of Washington's black underclass? It will come as no surprise to find that she recommends adding some black curators to the staff of the National Gallery of Art. She also wants to see what she calls the "major media," which we can assume includes *The Washington Post*, to add some "black critical voices" to their rosters of arts critics. And so on. In other words, the same agenda of mandatory affirmative-action quotas masquerading as "cultural diversity," now sometimes renamed "cultural equity." She condemns the press for "the reviews, analyses and interpretations [of the arts] that . . . are transmitted through white eyes, from a white perspective," and she calls for them to be supplanted by something a little more—well, multicultural and politically correct. As to precisely how this program of adding black curators to the museums and black critics to the papers is going to aid the drug addicts and the homeless or prevent one more violent crime from being committed on the streets of Washington—about this large question, Mrs. Cafritz has little to say. Those of us who do not subscribe to politically correct thought will no doubt be said to be lacking in "concern" or "sensitivity" for pointing out that there is a fundamental lack of alignment between the nature of the problem and the kind of solution Mrs. Cafritz believes she is offering. But of course neither sensitivity nor concern—prominent terms, both, in the liberal's lexicon of misplaced guilt—is at issue here.

As for the responses to Mrs. Cafritz's charges by the Washington art establishment, if we are to believe those that she reports in her article, they turn out to be a shade more gutless than those reported in the *Globe* from Boston. In response to Mrs. Cafritz, she quotes Roger Mandle, the deputy director of the National Gallery of Art, as saying that "We are anxious to hire an African American curator, but we do not have sufficient funding." J. Carter Brown, the director, was said to have assured Mrs.

4 "Culture in Black and White: Why Don't Washington's Arts Institutions Reflect Our Diversity?" by Peggy Cooper Cafritz; *The Washington Post*, "Outlook" section, January 20, 1991, page B5.

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Cafritz that "We are . . . placing greater emphasis on aspects of cultural equity in our personnel policies and audience development." At least in Boston, the chairman of the board at the Museum of Fine Arts—George Putnam—had the guts to point out to his inquisitors that "It doesn't do anyone a service to sacrifice quality to be able to diversify. We are trying to encourage people of diverse backgrounds to take junior positions and help them on their way." And Alan Shestack, the director of the museum, said what everyone knows to be the case. "When we advertise jobs," he said, "we do not get many minority applicants. The sad truth is that . . . nationwide the number of blacks who are curatorial professionals is infinitesimal." On the other hand, Mr. Shestack also considered it necessary to engage in the expected exercise in ritual self-criticism. "He expressed a commitment to change the institution," according to the *Globe*, "but warned that change would be slow in coming. Museum officials are now rewriting the mission statement to include a commitment to reaching a diverse population." Nothing is said, of course, about what the museum can now be expected to give this new public. The report ends with Mr. Shestack declaring himself to be "a member of the American Civil Liberties Union." If this is the best that our museum elites can do to meet this fateful challenge to the integrity of their institutions, we are in deep trouble.

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The disaffected populist: Christopher Lasch on progress

by Roger Kimball

No picture of life can have any veracity that does not admit the odious facts.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate."

For over twenty-five years, the historian and cultural critic Christopher Lasch has rather specialized in anatomizing—exaggerating, some would say—certain odious facts about American culture. Already in 1965, in his widely admired book *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963*, Professor Lasch deplored the "decline of the sense of community" in American society. Subtitled "The Intellectual as Social Type," this collection of biographical vignettes was meant to register the "peculiarly fragmented character of modern society" by examining the life and work of social reformers and pontificators from Jane Addams and Randolf Bourne through Lincoln Steffens, Herbert Croly, and Walter Lippmann. It ended with a polemical chapter called "The Anti-intellectualism of the Intellectuals," in which prominent writers and activists such as Sidney Hook, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Dwight Macdonald, and—speaking of odious facts about American culture—Norman Mailer were taken to task for failing to develop any politically effective criticism of American society.

As the Sixties devolved, so did the tenor of Professor Lasch's complaints. In *The Agony of the American Left* (1969), he informed us that we now faced "an unprecedented crisis" wrought by capitalism, "giant corporations," and other familiar villains. Co-opted by such nefarious forces, the American intellectual Left was in "agony" because it had become politically ineffective. He concluded that "It is clearer than ever that radicalism"—which he went on to identify with socialism—"is the only long-term hope for America."

If Professor Lasch had become a champion of *political* radicalism, however, that is not to say that he succumbed to the ethos of the counterculture and its antinomian frivolities. On the contrary, by the late Seventies he had emerged as an articulate and vociferous left-wing critic of the Left. In *Haven in a Heartless World* (1977), his study of the family, he takes it for granted that capitalism "has outlived its usefulness." But far from subscribing to the then current clichés advocating sexual revolution and the end of the family, he delivered a blistering attack on the hedonism and moral vacuousness of the "so-called counterculture"—described as "a mirror image of consumer capitalism"—and wound up, *faute de mieux*, endorsing traditional forms of authority, including the nuclear family.

In his next book, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979)—yet another in the long line of books that attempted to apply the "insights" of psychoanalysis to culture—Professor Lasch pushed his attack against the counterculture even harder. Although he was deeply indebted to such paradigmatically modish cultural radicals as Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse, Professor Lasch here in-

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sisted that "Cultural radicalism has become so fashionable and so pernicious in the support it unwittingly provides for the status quo, that any criticism of contemporary society that hopes to get beneath the surface has to criticize, at the same time, much of what currently goes under the name of radicalism." Naturally, such observations won him many critics, especially on the Left. In the pages of the humanities quarterly *Salmagundi* he responded to these critics, warning of "our impending economic and ecological crisis—the crisis of uninhibited capitalistic growth," and summed up the rationale for what we might call his conservative radicalism:

> A "conservative" respect for order and authority has now become an ingredient of any radical movement that seeks to transcend the progressive and socialist pieties of an earlier time. In mindlessly embracing a politics of "cultural revolution," the American left has played into the hands of the corporations, which find it all too easy to exploit a radicalism that equates liberation with hedonistic self-indulgence and freedom from family ties.

Here we have quintessentially Laschian passages, full of ecological alarm and traditionalist sermonizing. Lamenting the disintegration of authority and the rise of hedonism, harshly criticizing the excesses of the Left, he still manages to place the blame for the blight on capitalism ("the corporations"). It's the outmoded radical pieties, not radicalism itself, that must be transcended; contemporary society must still be criticized—radically criticized—but the resources provided by the Left have themselves been corrupted by the capitalist ethos.

While Professor Lasch's maverick leftism and gloomy prognostications about American society lost him the imprimatur of certain segments of the Left, they nonetheless earned him a respected place in academia (he has taught for many years at the University of Rochester) and in the circle of writers and journalists centered around *The New York Review of Books*, where much of his work first appeared. The publication of *The Culture of Narcissism* added nationwide notoriety to his accomplishments. America was ready for a bit of moralistic comeuppance, and Professor Lasch was ready to provide it. Under headings such as "The Narcissistic Personality of Our Time" and "The Banality of Pseudo-Self-Awareness," the book dissected the spiritual, psychological, and political landscape of contemporary American society.

The outlook was grim: "new forms of capitalist control" had invaded the American psyche, turning the population into helpless, sex-obsessed consumers. ("Consumers" had become one of the dirtiest words in Professor Lasch's vocabulary.) Nor did Americans refrain from consuming the bad news. *The Culture of Narcissism* enjoyed an immense success, catapulting its author onto the best-seller lists and television talk shows. President Carter even incorporated some of its hectoring rhetoric into one of his speeches. He warned the American people that they were greedy and self-absorbed, that the time had come for self-discipline, belt-tightening, and a lower standard of living. The effect of such lectures became clear at the polls in 1980, when one witnessed an unarguable demonstration that narcissism had not completely extinguished the public's instinct of self-preservation.

At least since *The Agony of the American Left*, Professor Lasch has looked to some version of populism as an alternative to the unending panoply of social, spiritual, and political ills he finds in contemporary society. His new book, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*,[1] continues this effort to rehabilitate populism by mounting an assault on the idea—what he would probably prefer to call the ideology—of progress. He takes his title from Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad," which plays on Bunyan's allegorical contrast between "Vanity Fair" and the "Celestial City." Which is "the true and

1 *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*, by Christopher Lasch; Norton, 591 pages, $25.

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only heaven"? Like Hawthorne, Professor Lasch seems to prefer an ambiguous reply.

Convinced that "old political ideologies have exhausted their capacity to explain events or to inspire men and women to constructive action," Professor Lasch attempts to exempt himself from this alleged stalemate by challenging certain inherited dichotomies: pessimism vs. optimism, community vs. the individual, and—preeminently—liberalism vs. conservatism. The title of the book's introduction, "The Obsolescence of Left and Right," may be said to epitomize this rhetorical gambit. In the course of eleven complex chapters, he takes us from a sketch of "the current mood" (identified as "a baffled sense of drift") to a consideration of the populist reaction against liberalism and its commitment to progress. "It is the darker voices especially that speak to us now," he concludes, "because they help us to distinguish 'optimism' from hope and thus give us the courage to confront the mounting difficulties that threaten to overwhelm us."

Beginning with eighteenth-century thinkers such as Edmund Burke and Adam Smith, Professor Lasch proceeds to examine how the often unspoken allegiance to the ideal of progress continues to inform contemporary political and social life in America. Scores of figures, intellectual movements, and political controversies—some major, some minor and half-forgotten—pass under his scrutiny. From Jonathan Edwards to the social critic and religious dilettante Orestes Brownson, Carlyle, Emerson, and William James, Professor Lasch canvasses British and American intellectual history (with occasional glances to France and Germany) for opinions about the idea of progress. Contemporary figures ranging from Walter Lippmann and Reinhold Niebuhr to Martin Luther King, Jr. (one of the book's heroes) round out the *dramatis personae*. Calvinism, Puritanism, Syndicalism, Progressivism, Liberalism, Neoconservatism: these and sundry other "ists" and "isms" are weighed and reckoned for their contribution, or their resistance, to the sway of progress, as are the civil-rights movement, the debate over abortion, and the controversy over busing in Boston in the 1960s and 1970s.

In many ways, *The True and Only Heaven* is Professor Lasch's most ambitious book to date; it is certainly his longest and most ostentatiously erudite. Unfortunately, it also reminds one of the old saying that it is often more difficult to write a short book than a long one. Professor Lasch has clearly labored hard on this book—but not, one feels, quite hard enough. Despite his impressive range of reference, what he has given us is more an agglomeration than a synthesis. He tends to proceed by accretion rather than argument, taking the reader down many, many historical and literary byways. However fascinating some of those byways may be in themselves, they do not always return the reader to the main road. Professor Lasch notes that his aim is less to recount a history than to reconstruct a "sensibility." But no amount of sensibility can make up for the impression of untidy sprawl. It is a pity, too, that in place of footnotes Professor Lasch elected to supply a long "Bibliographical Essay" in which he cites and briefly discusses many of the works he consulted in his researches. This thirty-five-page addendum amounts to a twelfth chapter. While conceivably of interest to certain students, for anyone wishing to track down a reference or ascertain the context of a quotation it is less than helpful.

What Mark Twain would have called the weather of the book is established with a question on the first page of the preface: "How does it happen that serious people continue to believe in progress, in the face of massive evidence that might have been expected to refute the idea of progress once and for all?" In case you misinterpreted this "massive evidence" and still thought that the idea of progress was worth salvaging, nearly six hundred pages follow by way of correction.

In some cases, however, it may be necessary to correct the correction. Consider the place that Emerson occupies in Professor Lasch's narrative. In his bibliographical essay, Professor Lasch tells us that he used to

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think of Emerson as "a foolish optimist" but that he now regards him as "our most important writer." Whatever one thinks of this reevaluation of Emerson, it should be noted that in this respect at least Professor Lasch is supporting something of a growth industry. Emerson has recently undergone a stunning rehabilitation in the academy. The indefatigable literary entrepreneur Harold Bloom, for example, holds that Emerson is America's great strong poet, the fount whence all poetic good flows; the well-known Harvard philosopher and devotee of B movies Stanley Cavell insists that Emerson is a philosophical thinker on a par with Descartes. When one adds the moralizing and distinctly preachy quality of Emerson's work, it is somehow not surprising that the prophet of Rochester discovered that the sage of Concord was "a nineteenth-century populist."

The Emerson that Professor Lasch champions is not the glib transcendentalist of "Self-Reliance" and other early effusions but the "tougher" author of "Fate" and "Compensation." Paraphrasing Emerson, Professor Lasch writes that "Sin is tax evasion—the attempt to escape the duty on desire." "Duty on desire" is a phrase Professor Lasch reverts to more than once. Indeed, in some ways *The True and Only Heaven* may be seen as his metaphysical tax manual, which outlines the psychical, political, and environmental penalties that progress has made us subject to. Yet it is not clear that Emerson can be enlisted in this project without penalizing the historical record. Even though he became gloomier as he grew older, Emerson was never quite the critic of progress that Professor Lasch wishes him to be. Specializing in odious facts himself, Professor Lasch quotes with approval Emerson's observation, from "Fate," that "No picture of life can have any veracity that does not admit the odious facts." Like many commonplaces, this pronouncement contains a good deal of truth. But later in this same essay Emerson insists that "Fate involves the melioration. No statement of the Universe can have any soundness which does not admit its ascending effort. The direction of the whole and of the parts is toward benefit, and in proportion to the health. Behind every individual closes organization; before him opens liberty,—the Better, the Best." This typical bit of Emerson gush hardly qualifies him as an apostle of the Laschian creed.

The nature of that creed is summed up in the title Professor Lasch gives to the concluding section of his last chapter: "Populism against Progress." Against the idea of progress he sets the "sense of limits," described as both "the forbidden topic" and as the "unifying thread" of his book. ("Limits and hope," he writes in his concluding pages: "these two words sum up the two lines of argument I have tried to weave together.") Continuing the stern campaign of earlier books, Professor Lasch tells us that we now face an "impending age of limits." If "progressive optimism rests, at bottom, on a denial of the natural limits on human power and freedom," then he wishes to foster "an affirmation of life in the teeth of its limits." What he wants is hope without optimism, modernity without technological hubris, stalwart citizens without greed and self-centeredness. "The progressive conception of history implied a society of supremely cultivated consumers," he writes near the end of the book; "the populist conception, a whole world of heroes."

Professor Lasch's deliberately provocative thesis is that an escape from the sterility and spiritual torpor of modernity is to be found in the the working-class sensibility of the petty-bourgeois: in "its moral realism, its understanding that everything has its price, its respect for limits, its skepticism about progress." To be sure, Professor Lasch acknowledges the familiar failings and weaknesses of his favored class—its tendency to indulge in provincialism, racism, nativism, xenophobia, anti-intellectualism, and other distinctly illiberal prejudices. But he argues that "liberals have lost sight of what is valuable in lower-middle-class culture in the eagerness to condemn what is objectionable."

In this he is no doubt correct. Nevertheless, one may wonder whether the virtues

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with which he dowers the lower-middle class really belong to them exclusively. Consider the catalogue he offers: "habits of responsibility associated with property ownership; the self-forgetfulness that comes with immersion in some all-absorbing piece of work; the danger that material comforts will extinguish a more demanding ideal of the good life; the dependence of happiness on the recognition that humans are not made for happiness." Furthermore, he tells us, lower-middle-class culture is

> organized around the family, church, and neighborhood. It values the community's continuity more highly than individual advancement, solidarity more highly than social mobility. Conventional ideals of success play a less important part in lower-middle-class life than the maintenance of existing ways. Parents want their children to get ahead, but they also want them to respect their elders, resist the temptation to lie and cheat, willingly shoulder the responsibilities that fall to them, and bear adversity with fortitude.

But are any of these good things solely or even notably characteristic of the lower-middle class? Are not most of them part of an inventory of virtues to which the middle and even the upper classes would subscribe? Surely Professor Lasch is here practicing very bad history. In praising "a more demanding ideal of the good life" than material abundance, or in affirming that happiness depends on a recognition that man is not "made for happiness," he is articulating ethical themes that have been with us at least since the Greeks. There is no reason to believe that they are the special property of the petty-bourgeois. While Professor Lasch is no Marxist—he even castigates one radical writer for having "left the land of the living for a visit to the Marxist mortuary"—he nonetheless continues to exhibit habits of thought characteristic of Marxist analysis. If the proletariat as hero of world history is absent, the lower-middle class steps in as a modest surrogate. Professor Lasch presents himself as a staunch critic of nostalgia, but one fears that something very like nostalgia is at work in his celebration of "lower-middle-class" virtues.

Nostalgia, or the bitterness that nostalgia breeds, may also be at work in the smattering of family history that Professor Lasch includes. In one extraordinary passage, he confides that "it was only gradually that it became clear to me that none of my own children, having been raised not for upward mobility but for honest work, could reasonably hope for any conventional kind of success." Is this because "honest work" gets one nowhere in a world committed to the idea of progress? Professor Lasch doesn't say. But he does give us a glimpse of life (whether real or imagined) in the Lasch household: "a house full of people; a crowded table ranging across generations; four-hand music at the piano; nonstop conversation and cooking; baseball games and swimming in the afternoons; long walks after dinner; a poker game or Diplomacy or charades in the evening, all these activites mixing children and adults —that was our idea of a well-ordered household." Chestnuts, that is to say, roasting on an open fire?

If Professor Lasch is right, the problem of achieving success through honest work is not confined to his own progeny. Reflecting on changes in the nature of work in recent society, he writes that "At every level of American society, it was becoming harder and harder for people to find work that self-respecting men and women could throw themselves into with enthusiasm." How is one to respond to this? No doubt many people, self-respecting and otherwise, are unenthusiastic about their work. But so what? Haven't they always been? Is Professor Lasch really suggesting that things are worse now than in days gone by? I'm afraid that he is.

> To see the modern world from the point of view of a parent is to see it in the worst possible light. This perspective reveals the unwholesomeness, not to put it more strongly, of our way of life: our obsession with sex, violence, and the pornography of "making it"; our addictive dependence on drugs, "entertainment,"

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> and the evening news; our impatience with anything that limits our soverign freedom of choice, especially with the constraints of marital and familial ties; our preference for "nonbinding commitments"; our third-rate educational system; our third-rate morality; our refusal to draw a distinction between right and wrong, lest we "impose" our morality on others and thus invite others to "impose" their morality on us; our reluctance to judge or be judged . . .

And on and on, ending with "our unstated assumption, which underlies so much of the propaganda for unlimited abortion, that only those children born for success ought to be allowed to be born at all." Once again, there is a lot to agree with here. But are these failings as all-encompassing as Professor Lasch suggests? Perhaps, on the contrary, to see the modern world from the point of view of a parent is to see it in its *best* possible light, since after all raising children is a commitment to the future deeply at odds with the excesses and failings of our "culture of narcissism."

Among the questions that Professor Lasch's discussion raises is whether these vices are due, as he puts it, to "a remarkably tenacious belief in progress." Wouldn't it be more plausible to say that they represent a failure to live up to the idea of progress, an idea that had hitherto helped preserve us from the moral chaos he deplores? As with so much of Professor Lasch's recent work, the often astute individual observations made in this book do not support the categorical indictment he attempts to make.

Nor do they support the uncomfortably categorical rhetoric he tends to employ: society is *now* unraveling; "the earth's ecology will *no longer* sustain an indefinite expansion of productive forces"; "a *growing* proletariat faces a grim future." While such locutions may be simply part of a rhetorical style, the frequency and vehemence with which Professor Lasch resorts to hyperbole imbues his analysis with an apocalyptic quality. Typical is this list from *The Minimal Self* (1984), Professor Lasch's sequel to *The Culture of Narcissism*: "the growing opposition to the nuclear arms race, the growing awareness of ecology, the growing criticism of consumerism and high technology, criticism of the 'masculine' psychology of conquest and competitive enterprise hold out the best hope for the future."

As these and numerous other passages from Professor Lasch's oeuvre suggest, he has been suffering from a bad case of eco-angst for some time. Nothing in *The True and Only Heaven* suggests that the symptoms are abating. The allegedly disastrous environmental consequences of economic growth emerge as a major leitmotif: "In view of the present rate of population growth, the attempt to export a Western standard of living to the rest of the world, even if it was economically feasible, . . . would amount to a recipe for environmental disaster." Near the end of the book, Professor Lasch writes that

> The belated discovery that the earth's ecology will no longer sustain an indefinite expansion of productive forces deals the final blow to the belief in progress. A more equitable distribution of wealth, it is now clear, requires at the same time a drastic reduction in the standard of living enjoyed by the rich nations and the privileged classes. Western nations can no longer hold up their standard of living and the enlightened, critical, and progressive culture that is entangled with it as an example for the rest of the world.

There are several things one could say about these observations. First, whatever the real threat posed to the environment by capitalist industry and patterns of consumption, it is notable that the West, and especially the United States, has dealt far more effectively with environmental hazards than other less "capitalistic" countries. If you're in doubt about this, just sample the water or the air in any Eastern European country, any Third World country, or in Japan. In this sense, the problem is not too much but too little progress. Second, given the distasteful self-infatuation that many environmentalists display, it seems odd that this sterling instance

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of "cultural radicalism" has escaped the charge of narcissism. Finally, it is worth reminding ourselves that Professor Lasch's worry is anything but new. We were told long ago that "The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man."

> The natural inequality of the two powers . . . forms the great difficulty that to me appears insurmountable in the way to the perfectibility of society. . . . No fancied equality, no agrarian revolutions in their utmost extent, could remove the pressure of it even for a single century. And it appears, therefore, to be decisive against the possible existence of a society, all the members of which, should live in ease, happiness, and comparative leisure; . . . if the premises are just, the argument is conclusive against the perfectibility of the mass of mankind.

This of course is from Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, the first edition of which was published in 1798. I mention the edition because though Malthus started out as what we may now have to call a Laschian, he had wisdom enough to see that his dire prognostications were overstated. While never a Panglossian figure, by the time he published the second edition of his infamous essay, Malthus affirmed his faith in the possibility of "gradual and progressive improvement in human society"—he affirmed, that is to say, his faith in the possibility of progress. Subsequent advances in technology and food production have shown that Malthus's original worries were as wildly exaggerated as Professor Lasch's.

The fact that "progress" comes in many flavors brings us to a more general objection to Professor Lasch's indictment. The callously blind optimism of a Dr. Pangloss is very different from the utopianism of a Marxist revolutionary marching under the banner of "necessary" progress, which in turn is very different from a simple faith in the future. It is one of the oddities of this book devoted to the idea of progress that it is supremely fuzzy about the idea of progress itself. Sometimes Professor Lasch seems to be concerned mostly with the psychological ramifications of the idea of progress, sometimes with its ethical implications. Most often, perhaps, he criticizes the commitment to progress conceived of as long-term economic growth. "The idea of progress," he writes, "owes its appeal not to its millennial vision of the future but to the seemingly more realistic expectation that the expansion of productive forces can continue indefinitely."

While Professor Lasch allows that capitalism cannot "be made to carry the whole indictment of modern culture," he also insists that it cannot be "absolved." "Capitalism itself," we read in one typical passage, "promotes an ethic of hedonism and health and thus undermines the 'traditional values' of thrift and self-denial." In other words, he gives us the usual caricature of capitalism, capitalism stripped of its achievements and recast by ecological sloganeering. Refusing to acknowledge that the expectation of indefinitely expanding productive forces is more than "seemingly" realistic, Professor Lasch distorts the historical record. Yes, there have been and will continue to be setbacks, excesses, cruelties, and inequalities in capitalist societies. Yet because the alternative to capitalism in the modern world is not authenticity but poverty, only a disaffected populist (or some other utopian) would dream of dismantling or curtailing the productive forces of capitalism.

Professor Lasch's attack on capitalism provides another instance of Marxist habits of thought outlasting a commitment to the dogma. While he persists in attributing almost demonic power to capitalism, the truth is that capitalism is primarily an engine for creating wealth, not, à la Marx, an ideology designed to oppress and corrupt the unsuspecting. Indeed, it happens that capitalism is the most dazzlingly productive engine of wealth ever devised. This is not to deny that nations living under capitalism tend to have the problems Professor Lasch anatomizes. But it is to suggest that these problems should be blamed not on an

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economic system but on the human actors who work within it. In my view, Professor Lasch is right to criticize the "conservative" application of "market strategies" and "laissez-faire" thinking to aspects of life outside the sphere of economics; such thinking does indeed act as a solvent on many traditional values. Nevertheless, the triumph of crass materialism—for that is what we are talking about—is a product not of an abstraction called "capitalism" but of the decisions and actions of individual human beings.

There are moments when Professor Lasch seems to recognize that the catastrophes he enumerates derive from something other than capitalism. He notes that to a large extent the ethos of capitalism is itself the product of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, and he suggests that in this sense the problem is not capitalism per se but the "sense of unlimited power conferred by science—the intoxicating prospect of man's conquest of the natural world." Given the theme of "limits," it is a pity he didn't say more about the Promethean temptation inherent in technology: the illusion that every human quandary is susceptible to calculation and technological intervention. Here is the real problem with which progress faces us: learning to say "yes" to science and technology without sacrificing our humanity. Disparaging the idea of progress *tout court* is not a responsible solution. As Robert Nisbet has argued in his *History of the Idea of Progress* (1980), "no single idea has been more important than . . . the idea of progress in Western civilization." While acknowledging that it has been enlisted in bad causes as well as good, Nisbet maintains that "In its oldest and broadest meaning the idea has been associated far more often with good than with evil." (He also observes, wisely, that "there is no moral value that is not susceptible to corrupt use.")

It is instructive to contrast Nisbet's understanding of the idea of progress with Professor Lasch's. For Professor Lasch, adherence to the idea of progress seems tantamount to endorsing sterile rationalism, aggressive secularism, materialism, and a selfish commitment to reckless economic growth. Nisbet, on the other hand, lists "five major premises" that have traditionally characterized the idea from the Greeks to our day:

> belief in the value of the past; conviction of the nobility, even superiority, of Western civilization; acceptance of the worth of economic and technological growth; faith in reason . . . ; and, finally, belief in the intrinsic importance, the ineffaceable *worth* of life on this earth.

In other words, Nisbet takes a view of progress almost diametrically opposed to that described in *The True and Only Heaven*. Which rings truer? Which better accounts for the achievements of our culture? Which offers more hope for the future?

Professor Lasch takes great pains to encourage us to abandon both pessimism and optimism for the more modest virtue of hope. There is much to recommend this. In any robust sense of the word, optimism involves turning a blind eye to the "odious facts" of the world around us just as pessimism involves a monstrous ingratitude in the face of the unearned blessings we receive. Both involve a culpable distortion of reality. Yet it is not clear whether Professor Lasch has himself overcome the temptations of pessimism. Moral passion is doubtless his greatest asset. It may also be his greatest liability. Addicted to what the historian Herbert Butterfield described as "the luxury and pleasing sensuousness of moral indignation," he is never less than earnest. But he is seldom more than interesting. He raises important—indeed, central—questions, discusses them articulately, yet often fails to persuade. Perhaps this is because his diagnoses are so sweeping and historically one-sided. Perhaps it is because, having discarded one left-wing view after the next, he nevertheless continues to find himself unable to abandon the central left-wing habit of defining himself in opposition to establishment culture. In any event, his attack on progress represents not a triumph of hope but an unusually dour form of populist pessimism.

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Barnett Newman's big ideas

by Deborah Solomon

Of all the Abstract Expressionists, Barnett Newman (1905-1970) was the one who talked the most. He had many ideas about what a painting should be and was constantly trying to explain them in articles, public statements, manifestoes, letters to newspapers, or just impromptu conversations at the Betty Parsons Gallery, where he often could be found on Saturday afternoons holding forth among friends. By now many of us are familiar with the things Newman said. He believed that his paintings (and occasional sculptures) were closely related to primitive art. He believed they transcended appearances and made contact with what he called emotional absolutes. For him, the "sublime" and the "awesome" weren't merely by-products of art, but qualities to be directly pursued and promoted, and he championed them as assiduously as politicians of his era championed victory gardens. Among the many ironies surrounding his career is that he took a hard-sell approach to spiritual exaltation.

It isn't difficult to understand why Newman was so eager to enshroud his work in a haze of higher meaning. As one who specialized in a kind of art based on extreme reduction, he obviously wanted to reassure the viewer that there is more to his paintings than meets the eye. He didn't want them to be seen as mere designs—an anathema to most any artist, but particularly to one who began his career in the garment trade. (Newman worked for his father's menswear company for a decade before he turned to art.) At the risk of gross distortion, it seems worth saying that when Newman took up painting, he was continuing in the family trade—what is a canvas if not a *shmatte*?—but now his rags had a purpose. Like many of the New York intellectuals with whom he came of age, he grew up in a struggling Russian-Jewish household and took refuge from his common past in the empyreal sphere of ideas. Art, he believed, shouldn't offer up pleasures, but cerebrations of the most serious and impersonal sort.

While one ought to be inclined to ignore the many claims Newman made on behalf of his work—and allow it to succeed or fail on its own merits—this is not easily done. For Newman's ideas live on not only in his own writings, but in those of just about every art critic who has written admiringly of his work. Ardent, gregarious, extravagantly good-humored, Newman was a magnetic figure who was able to make people sympathetic to his ideas, if through no other means than the force of his personality. In 1951, when Thomas B. Hess published his important study *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase*—it was the first book to include a chapter on Abstract Expressionism—the artist was nowhere mentioned in it, presumably because his first one-man show had been held only a year earlier and he hadn't yet established a serious reputation. In 1969, however, Hess published a monograph on Newman, and by then had come to

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embrace not only the artist's work but his self-important way of talking about it. The Hess book legitimized the view that the artist's "zips" deserve to be equated with virtually every religious and philosophical meaning one can pin on a line, including even the separation of the water and the sky in Genesis. As much as Newman, Hess believed the pictures were invested with biblical importance.

What does one see standing in front of a typical Barnett Newman painting? More often than not, one sees an enormous rectangle of flat, uninflected color with some parallel stripes running up and down it. This may not sound like much, yet a Newman painting does not lack for visual impact. The pared-down imagery, coupled with the exaggerated size and saturated color, announce that the artist is striving for importance, and a viewer's first instinct is to respect this artist who clearly had no qualms about the greatness of art. Yet it's difficult to progress past the point of initial admiration. Careful looking yields virtually nothing more than what one sees at first sight, and as a result one can feel baffled, and even intimidated. Viewers who aren't aware of the artist's intentions may feel they're being deceived.

Obviously, not all Newmans are the same. There's one in the Museum of Modern Art entitled *The Wild* (1950) that may be his most compelling work. It consists of just one "zip"—an exceedingly narrow strip of orange that is about eight feet high. Newman's "zips" are intended as signs of vertical ascent, and this one succeeds; the picture, with its attenuated space, is like a painterly version of a Giacometti walking man. Yet the sense of upward motion it conveys is altogether lacking in the later work across the room from it, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (Newman's titles are singularly pretentious), a landmark of Abstract Expressionism. This huge cadmium-red canvas has a cold, leaden feel and expresses nothing beyond its insistent redness. One wonders whether Newman realized that in eliminating everything from his pictures except a couple of stripes, he was eliminating the possibility that a viewer could respond to them as anything other than strident and programmatic statements completely at odds with the metaphysical aspirations he claimed he sought in his work.

This is not to imply that abstract painting can't offer a so-called spiritual experience, or transcend its material nature. Mark Rothko, with whom Newman is often paired—there's a Newman sculpture outside the entrance of the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas—strikes me as the more capable of the two of translating emotion into paint. To be sure, Rothko was prone to pomposities; he went more than a bit overboard when he made that famous remark about wanting to create a "tragic and timeless" art. Nonetheless, one comes away from his pictures, with their quivering mists and golden afterglows, convinced that their subject is larger than mere aesthetics. From Clyfford Still's, too: one might tire of his blustery arrogance and scowling pronouncements, yet something genuinely affecting is achieved in the dark, concentrated, mine-like spaces of his paintings. (His mines became gold mines when Mary Boone put on an exhibition of his work last fall, with uniformed guards pacing the gallery and a slim catalogue priced ostentatiously at $80.)

To say that Newman's work doesn't move a viewer to feelings of spiritual rapture is not to call it a failure. In the end it doesn't matter whether artists live up to their own expectations. What matters is whether they live up to ours. And Newman's work, I think, does represent an undeniable achievement—albeit a smaller one than the public has been led to believe. Formalist critics have long contended that the artist's originality lies in his use of color, which is applied in large, unbroken areas (as opposed to contrasting sections) and thereby prefigures the color-field movement that flourished in this country in the Sixties. This assessment seems fair enough. Newman is one of our great monochromists. He employed color on an audacious scale and gave it a haughty, magisterial presence. Such a conclusion is not in keeping with how the artist wanted his work to be

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seen, but then Newman was a paradoxical figure—the Abstract Expressionist who did the most to define the goals of the movement, yet whose work has the least in common with it.

It is no secret that Newman's work was never particularly well respected by his fellow Abstract Expressionists. He was seen as someone who didn't start painting on a full-time basis until relatively late (around 1945, when he entered his forties) and who didn't possess much natural ability. Newman himself once told an interviewer that he wasn't taken seriously by his colleagues because he spent the Thirties salvaging his father's business and earning his living as a substitute art teacher when everyone else was working on the Federal Arts Project. What also may have hurt his standing is that for a while he was better known as a writer than as a painter. In the course of the Forties, he appointed himself a spokesman for the new abstraction, churning out essays that appeared in little magazines like *Tiger's Eye* or that were intended as prefaces to exhibition catalogues. His writing career ended in 1948 when he painted *Onement I*, his first distinctly original work.

Given the attention that is nowadays accorded to Abstract Expressionism, it was inevitable that Newman's writings would eventually be assembled into a book. Thus *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*,[1] the latest addition to the rapidly lengthening shelf on Abstract Expressionism. *Selected Writings* is a thick, often engaging volume that doesn't substantially alter our view of the artist, but that nonetheless can be said to represent an indispensable resource for anyone with a serious interest in either Newman or the New York School. All the key documents are here. One wishes, however, that the editing had been more astute. Three scholars collaborated on the project—the title page gives credit to John P. O'Neill, editor in chief of the Metropolitan Museum, Mollie McNickle, a graduate student whose doctoral subject is Newman, and Richard Shiff, a professor of art at the University of Texas, Austin—yet it is not clear who, if anyone, was in charge. There has long been a need for an intelligent assessment of Newman's writings, but this book fails to provide one. Instead of offering critical enlightenment, it presents the artist's papers in a deadening and distorting atmosphere of fan-like reverence.

It should perhaps be mentioned that *Selected Writings* is not the sort of collection that can be read as a patchwork autobiography. There is little in it that hints at the everyday life of its subject or that allows one to see him in a close, unguarded way; there are no love letters, no post cards recounting evanescent pleasures, no spur-of-the-moment communiqués conveying what it was like to live in Greenwich Village in the days when it still belonged to bohemia. Newman didn't write those sort of letters. Rather he issued sweeping pronouncements. His writing, like his art, concerns itself only with the most august themes and is oblivious to life's sundry little dramas. Reading along, one continually wants him to step down from his soapbox—to enlighten us on a subject other than Greek tragedy or the corrupting power of political institutions—but it's futile.

Newman was an artist who seemed to enjoy nothing so much as mounting a challenge to people and institutions, and his sallies on authority began early on. One of the more comical moments recounted in *Selected Writings* occurs in 1938, after the young artist flunked a practical drawing test administered by the New York City school system. As a result he wasn't allowed to teach art, except as a substitute. Newman found this most unjust, and promptly struck back. Convinced that the problem lay not with himself but with the fusty standards of the school board, he rounded up a group of fellow test-flunkers and arranged an exhibition at the A.C.A. Galleries entitled "Can We Draw? The Board of Examiners Says—No!" The artists in the show were eventually of-

1 *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, edited by John P. O'Neill, with text notes and commentary by Mollie McNickle and an introduction by Richard Shiff; Alfred A. Knopf, 331 pages, $40.

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fered a chance to retake the exam, but Newman fared no better the second time around.

While one can be amused by Newman's youthful pranks—at the age of twenty-seven he ran for mayor of New York City on the cultural write-in ticket—it quickly becomes apparent that his actions were governed by the most adolescent sort of thinking. In his writings he took on big subjects, but tended to treat them in black-and-white terms. "What about Isolationist Art?," a lengthy, unpublished essay from 1942, is typical of his bludgeoning approach. Frustrated by the popularity of American Scene painting, Newman accuses its champion, Thomas Craven, of exploiting such "methods of Hitler" as intensified nationalism to further his cause. Hitler's name is mentioned in the essay more than a dozen times, leaving one to wonder if Newman knows his mountains from his mole hills.

Whatever subtlety Newman may have lacked as a writer he more than made up in tenacity, a quality that would serve him well in promoting the new abstraction. It is to his credit that he was able to admire the work of other painters without envying them; in the course of the Forties he wrote appreciatively and generously about many relatively unknown artists, among them Rufino Tamayo, Adolph Gottlieb, Milton Avery, Theodore Stamos, and Herbert Ferber. His comments on their behalf generally consist of short, panegyrical catalogue forewords in which the work is seen as a metaphor for "the tragedy of life," and the artist is held up as an existential hero. No matter which artist Newman was writing about, he treated him as if he were Michelangelo; everyone is presented as the most talented creator of his time. This might not make for the most penetrating criticism, yet Newman was more interested in being a crusader than a critic.

Besides championing the work of his contemporaries, Newman is well known for his zealous promotion of primitive art. Starting in 1944, when he organized a show of pre-Columbian stone sculpture in the back of the Wakefield Book Shop (which was run by his future dealer, Betty Parsons), he took it upon himself to gain a wider audience for primitive art of both the ancient and tribal varieties. In doing so, he hoped to acquaint the gallery-going public with the aesthetic underlying the new abstraction. As he stated in 1947, "there has arisen during the war years a new force in American painting that is the equivalent of the primitive art impulse." Later, in the early Seventies, when art historians like Irving Sandler and Dore Ashton wrote their pioneering books on Abstract Expressionism, they gave great weight to Newman's comments and asked that we accept his work as a direct response to the abstract and symbolic tendencies that inhere in the primitive tradition.

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see that Newman's work—be it the quasi-surreal pictures of the mid-Forties or the later "zips"—bears no more connection to primitive art than does the work of virtually any artist who uses the stripped-down forms of abstraction. When he claimed to feel a "bond of understanding" with peoples ranging from the ancient Incas to the Northwest Coast Indians, what was he referring to? For Newman, primitive art was essentially a political vehicle. It suited his imagination to believe that his work and that of his contemporaries represented a break from the Greek ideal, with its emphasis on refinement and beauty; in the example of primitive man, he found a convenient symbol not only of his spiritual longings, but of his outside social status as well. And he found a way to make the largest claims possible on behalf of the new abstraction. The implication was that the new art, like primitive art, transcended beauty, transcended appearances, and transcended the peculiarities of history. It came out of a tradition that was older and grander than that of Western art.

And Newman, apparently, did believe that his work represented a total break from his European antecedents. Among the most outrageous arguments he put forth in his writings is that his paintings have nothing in common with earlier abstraction—that, in fact, they aren't even abstract. In 1950, at the

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time of his first one-man show, he noted: "These paintings are not 'abstractions,' nor do they depict some 'pure' idea. They are specific and separate embodiments of feeling . . ." In denying that his work was abstract, Newman was trying to dissociate himself from the artistic lineage that begins with Mondrian, who may have been an influence on him, but whose work, he felt, was inferior to his because it refuses to reject the natural world. Mondrian's rectangles, in the view of Newman, are merely natural forms masquerading as geometry.

Newman, clearly, had an inflated sense of his own importance, and his vanity eventually got him in trouble with his fellow artists. What may have been the most crushing moment of his life came in 1951, when he had his second show at the Parsons Gallery. After years of encouraging other artists and praising their work in both conversation and writing, he realized that no one was willing to do the same for him, and in a fit of exasperation he removed his paintings from the gallery. He refused to show again for seven years.

Newman's letters from the last two decades of his life are a compendium of outrage and unrelenting bitterness. He wrote to Sidney Janis saying that he wouldn't attend the opening of a Rothko show because "I am frankly bored with the uninspired, or to put it more accurately, I am bored with the too easily inspired." He wrote to Clement Greenberg accusing him of being tardy in discovering his work. In a letter to *ARTnews* magazine, he said that Clyfford Still stole the idea of making black paintings from him. He had even less affection for Robert Motherwell, who, he felt, was always trying to claim a large place for himself in the history books, when "the only contribution [he] has made is to invent labels like the ridiculous one of 'Ecole de New York.'" Another nemesis was John Baur, the director of the Whitney Museum, which was slow to recognize Newman's work. In a letter to Baur in 1955, Newman insisted that the catalogue for the "New Decade" exhibition be withdrawn since it mentioned Newman's name even though his work wasn't in the show: "Are you in the habit of using other people's names without first getting permission? Do you always take what you need without asking?"

Newman is easy to ridicule. He believed he was a great artist and moved through life demanding that his work be seen as a nearly miraculous achievement. When it wasn't, he was devastated, and lashed out at the world as if it had done him a terrible wrong. Vanity, of course, is not exactly a rare quality in artists, yet Newman's hubris was exceptional nonetheless. He claimed to be devoted to the pursuit of truth, while others were chasing after mere beauty, and to prove it he distilled his art into its most elemental qualities. It was inconceivable to him that there might be a discrepancy between his work and his words, inconceivable that perhaps he was wrong to insist that his art went beyond Mondrian and all other abstract painting and could be understood only in relation to primitive art. Newman was not a sensitive critic. He was a terrible critic. His writing was essentially a form of agitprop, a loud shout on behalf of the new abstract art. It's amazing that it has remained more or less unchallenged for as long as it has.

Yet, one would not want to make the mistake of dismissing Newman on the basis of his distorted ideas. He was a key figure in the Abstract Expressionist movement, and it would be most churlish to deny him his place in that pantheon. How should he be remembered? He himself, with his yearning for meaning, wrapped his pictures in fancy ideological paper. In the end, however, one doesn't need his commentary to know what his art is about. His pictures, with their mute, dogmatic surfaces, share the same theme as his writing—they show how it's possible to be so in love with the idea of art that you become an ideologue.

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Q.D.L.

by Donald Lyons

The completion of the publication by Cambridge University Press of the three volumes of the *Collected Essays* of Q. D. Leavis makes it possible to estimate the achievement of this remarkable writer.[1] Born Queenie Dorothy Roth in 1906, she came up, a brilliant reader in English, to Girton College in Cambridge in 1926; in 1929, she became engaged to her tutor F. R. Leavis. Her book *Fiction and the Reading Public*, a sociological anatomy of the readership of best-sellers, came out in 1932. Then, in her own words, "I spent the next twenty years in writing for and helping to edit *Scrutiny*, which my husband and I established to advance our position in the field of literary criticism." During the *Scrutiny* years, "I myself contributed pioneering essays of evaluation and elucidation on the American novelists Edith Wharton, Henry James and . . . Hawthorne, and I wrote similar studies on many English novelists, particularly Jane Austen, on whose writings I did some research resulting in a completely new account of the nature and value of her work. In consequence, Jane Austen is no longer considered a lightweight comic artist but is accepted as being a major and deeply serious novelist concerned with the complexities of living, with its pressures and menaces, in a period of social and moral change." After the demise of *Scrutiny* in 1952, Q. D. Leavis wrote introductions to various English novels, wrote the lion's share of *Dickens the Novelist* (1970), a collaboration with her husband, and gave lectures on the English, American, and European novel, all of which were unpublished at her death in 1981. G. Singh, Professor of Italian at the Queen's University, Belfast, has assembled almost all her uncollected and unpublished writings. Together with *Dickens the Novelist*, the *Collected Essays* constitute her legacy and solicit consideration as the product of a major critic.

But no look at Mrs. Leavis can fail to mention the extraordinary presences that she and her husband, by all accounts, were in the Cambridge and the England of their times. They saw themselves as embattled upholders of values debased by the university and its creature, the metropolitan literary world. They stimulated and throve on an electrified field of loyalties, betrayals, enthusiasms, recriminations; they generated unsleeping intensities of acceptance and rejection. A collection of memorial essays, *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions*, provides vivid

1 *Q. D. Leavis: Collected Essays*, edited by G. Singh, is published by Cambridge University Press. *Volume 1: The Englishness of the English Novel* (352 pages) appeared in 1983 (and is now out of print); *Volume 2: The American Novel and Reflections on the European Novel* (280 pages, $47.50; $18.95 paper) in 1985; and *Volume 3: The Novel of Religious Controversy* (347 pages, $49.50) in 1989. The other major work by Q. D. Leavis discussed in this essay, *Dickens the Novelist*, written in collaboration with F. R. Leavis, is available from Rutgers University Press (372 pages, $15 paper).

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testimonials to the state of affairs.[2] More often than not, Queenie is remembered as the more rebarbative of the two, fanning her polite husband's combative flame. Much of the "poison" in her is traced back to "the effects upon her of her Jewish family's casting her off when she married a gentile." When a German bomb "wiped out her family home in 1940, killing both parents, Queenie let it be known that she wanted no gestures of mourning from friends." All pay tribute to her courage during long battles with cancer. But until full and serious critical biographies of Frank and of Queenie Leavis appear, it is only their works that must matter. I know virtually nothing of the Leavises outside their writings, and, the more I read about the minefields of their ambiance, the happier I feel about that. Personalities of quite sufficient vividness, after all, emerge from the words of these two writers on the page.

The first volume of the essays of Q. D. Leavis (hereafter Q.D.L.), which Professor Singh entitled *The Englishness of the English Novel*, contains general studies of Jane Austen, as well as introductions to editions of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, and *Silas Marner*, plus a lecture on *Wuthering Heights*. Q.D.L.'s own characterization, audacious and self-exalting, of what she did for Jane Austen has been cited. It was "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings," appearing in four parts in *Scrutiny* from 1941 to 1944, that constituted her first large critical achievement. In it she undertook to investigate how the novels grew out of their author's own omnivorous novel-reading, out of her youthful parodic cameos and fragments, *and* out of some catalytic anxiety or pressure in her real life. Of *Pride and Prejudice* Q.D.L. exhaustively traces the characters and incidents to their originals in other fiction or the author's juvenilia or the author's life. She mentions the book's parodic parasitism upon Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*, imagining Austen asking herself, "What would be the reactions of a real girl if, like Cecilia, she was appealed to by her lover's family not to marry him because she was an unsuitable match?" But Q.D.L. goes deeper, to the personal bedrock of the book:

> What we have in *Pride and Prejudice*, then, is not simply a subject taken over for ridicule, or a realistic instead of a conventional treatment of a plot, nor is it the simple "borrowing" for a slightly different purpose that is the only recognition its relation to *Cecilia* has received from Dr Chapman and other scholars. It is the central idea of *Cecilia* given an elaborate orchestration, as it were, sometimes guyed (when Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley stand for the dignified opposition of Delvile's family [in Burney] to his attachment), more often used as an opportunity for self-exploration on the author's part (Elizabeth's outbreak about Charlotte's marriage and her discussion of "candour" with her sister are spots where the crust of objective comedy visibly cracks). . . . Her writing and reading and living up to the point of the final revision of *Pride and Prejudice* have all tended towards its creation.

Who else was treating fiction like this in 1941? (Edmund Wilson, it may be ventured, and I will compare his treatment of Dickens in his "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" [1940] to Q.D.L.'s later. But Wilson had little to offer on Jane Austen. He pays tribute, in a short 1944 *New Yorker* piece, to Q.D.L.'s work in *Scrutiny* but, though placing Austen with Dickens at the pinnacle of English fiction, indulges in nothing more substantial than a spate of after-dinner-among-the-boys harrumphing. He declares that "the woman reader wants to identify herself with the heroine" in fiction generally and is thereby prevented by its "meaching" heroine Fanny from appreciating *Mansfield Park*, whereas "the male reader" has no such problem. He finds that "Emma is not interested in men," but he skitters modestly away from offering "any specific Freudian formula" to cover her case. If Q.D.L. was later less than generous in saluting some of Wilson's pioneering—her

2 *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions*, edited by Denys Thompson, was published by Cambridge University Press in 1984.

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favorite word about herself—criticism of fiction, perhaps this insufferable *New Yorker* piece burned in her memory, illustrating in miniature as it did Wilson's fatal temptation, never entirely overcome, to simplistic Freudian reductivism, even in dealing with such as Austen and Dickens and James.) Q.D.L. used her unexampled mastery of sources (as one instance among a thousand, she parallels Austen's reference in a letter to a cousin's simpering wife going sea-bathing with her family to a similar outing by Emma's simpering sister-in-law in *Emma*) not as an end in itself but in the service of showing how a great artist explored herself and her world. Q.D.L. went on in the Austen essays to sketch the transformation of a fragment called *The Watsons* into *Emma*, and to lay out at elaborate length a case for the transformation of Austen's early, short epistolary novel *Lady Susan* (a brittle comedy containing fashionably depraved London types who might have seemed more at home in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* than in Austen) into *Mansfield Park*. Q.D.L. finds Austen's impulse to create the vicious society seductress Lady Susan in a distorting animus felt by the writer toward a sister-in-law who was the cosmopolitan widow of a guillotined French nobleman. By the time of *Mansfield Park*, the melodramatic Lady Susan has evolved into the somewhat more shaded Mary Crawford, whose treatment by the author still remains an artistic sin: "The censure Mary Crawford comes in for is so much heavier than there is any occasion for. . . . She stands in [mousy heroine] Fanny's way chiefly, and the author has identified her interest with Fanny's, but she stands there innocently." Q.D.L. diagnoses Austen as deflected by unmastered emotion in *Mansfield Park*: "This unnatural censure, to be found only in this novel, of Jane Austen's own standards of judgment, of her independence of outlook and her own instinctive values, is what the discerning reader finds intolerable. To deny his own light is the worst offense of which an artist can be guilty."

This 1942 analysis of Austen reveals an original and sophisticated sensibility. We glimpse, through obiter dicta and glancing allusions, a felt theory of how great fiction is written, of how it must emerge from the life and living of its author. Reading this resembles reading *The Sacred Wood* and glimpsing a complicated theory of poetics. Of course, Q.D.L. has her invaluable idiosyncrasies, too. First, she was always enamored of source-hunting. She loved finding dependencies and borrowings and appropriations of her chosen turf of fiction and made her case thus: "It is impossible to read nineteenth-century novels in bulk without coming to the conclusion, I find, that the Victorian novelists read and used each other's work quite as freely as Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists did theirs." Her century was, she saw, a Golden Age of interreacting writers, all keeping up furiously (a characteristic appendix in *Dickens the Novelist* is entitled "'Oliver Twist,' 'Jane Eyre,' and 'David Copperfield,'" and it traces Dickens's greater inwardness in the presentation of the child hero in the second book to his absorption of the Brontë). Occasionally Q.D.L., in her obsessive *Quellenforschung*, leaves herself open for "refutation"; one reads that so-and-so has conclusively rebutted her claim that, say, *Mansfield Park* evolved from *Lady Susan*. And new information might indeed require adjustments to Q.D.L.'s schematic presentation. But "refutation" is basically not in question, for Q.D.L.'s case is a literary-critical one: that Austen uniquely skews her treatment of some characters in *Mansfield Park* and that, therefore, as Eliot said of *Hamlet*, the work is "full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art." Such an argument, about *Hamlet* or about *Mansfield Park*, needs countering, if it is to get it, not from manuscript dating but from a more convincing reading.

Q.D.L.'s words about *Mansfield Park* in 1942 were not her last. A 1957 introduction to an edition of the book explains the structural function of the play enacted by the characters and remarks on similarities to Pope's "Augustan vision of the place of the great country-house in the life of the na-

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tion," calling the episode of the visit to such a house "the finest and most original in the Austen novels." The book itself is called "the first modern novel in England" in working out a "psychological analysis of feeling, which creates a new style." It is Austen's finest. (Q.D.L. here shows her usual alertness to fiction's growing incorporation of dramatic poetry's use of language.) But it will not surprise any reader of the Leavises that the 1957 evaluation does not acknowledge the earlier one, which, if not wholly antithetical to the later one, certainly put its stresses elsewhere. But for us, who can read and profit from both equally dogmatic evaluations of the book, the second look is pure gain. Who complains when Yeats revises his feelings about Irish rebels, or if Stevens wrestles yet again with the contours of "fiction"?

The final part of "A Critical Theory" looks at Austen's letters and the tart, candid, call-a-spade-a-spade Regency world, wholly un-Victorian, that can be perceived behind them. It was this society, Q.D.L. shows, that Austen refined into art, under the pressure of such problems as finding breathing room for privacy of consciousness in those crowded Regency interiors (to which, by the way, she devotes a whole essay, "Jane Austen and a Changing Society").

Q.D.L. excels on the Brontës, finding in Charlotte especially an answering spirit. "No other Victorian novelist registers such insights into the undercurrents and anomalies of human feelings, the unpredictable and irrational human needs, until D. H. Lawrence. We notice also that all Charlotte Brontë's heroines can emit scorching fire when intolerably oppressed or provoked, in defense of their self-respect or of cherished views; however cold their names [Eyre, Snowe], their nature is passionate, though normally under tremendous restraint." But Q.D.L. does not stop at approving sympathy; she shows author and heroines at the work of wrestling with real issues. For Lucy Snowe, *Villette*'s heroine, the problem was above all religion: "The pull of Catholicism against all reason and Protestant habit was for Charlotte evidently great, and painful." (As we shall see later, the religious issue was seen by Q.D.L. as central to the century's novels). In *Villette*, religion is linked to sex, leading Q.D.L. to remark (about an early version of the novel) that "the relation between man and woman, in love and work . . . is quite unconventional and seen as a special instance only of the complex and unpredictable relations of human beings in general: man to man and man to child and parent to child, as well as in sexual attraction between man and woman. [The heroine] is determined to maintain, and be recognized as having the right to, an equality with her husband in love and in work, though she also maintains the differentness between male and female, rendering to her husband a deference which her own self-respect as his wife requires and demanding from him a corresponding valuation of her personality." The personal timbre here, unheard in Q.D.L.'s writing about Jane Austen, amounts to an endorsing recognition of something new brought into fiction by Charlotte Brontë and felt by Q.D.L. to be a vital datum about marriage and about life.

Q.D.L.'s final response to Charlotte Brontë stops short of the highest accolade: "Perhaps she is not so indisputably one of the great wise novelists like Tolstoy, George Eliot, and Conrad. Yet, she is not merely one of the sufferers like Kafka. . . . If it is argued that Jane Austen (for instance) was better balanced, we must ask what kind of balance is in question and whether one kind can be compared with another—there is the balance of a canoe on the surface of the water and the balance of the iceberg of which four-fifths is out of sight. The former is more economical and direct in movement, but the latter has irresistible strength, force and appeal to the imagination, and incomparable beauty." This valedictory encomium illustrates some habits of Q.D.L.'s: when she is engaged with an admired author, that author tends to become an absolute standard of reference, elbowing aside rival claimants to supremacy. And there is her headlong prose, rushing, omnivorous, like a stream in flood sweeping up root and rock and cow, but all the time knowing just

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where it is headed. Its loose, tumbling vitality is never erratic or reckless.

Q.D.L. accosts the more classical Emily Brontë with originality and cleansing vigor in "A Fresh Approach to 'Wuthering Heights,'" first given as a lecture at Harvard. She sets out to deglamorize the figures of Heathcliff and Catherine, treating the former as a Byronic cliché "wheeled out to perform" at necessary intervals and the latter as a destructively willful egoist exemplifying "the tragedy of being caught between socially incompatible cultures." Q.D.L. stresses the importance of the second generation (Hareton and, more significantly, Cathy) as they work to transcend their mixed and flawed heredity and to merge two opposing ways of life, Grange and Heights. Appendices illustrate "the traditional culture of the Yorkshire moorlands and its characteristic human product" from contemporary chronicles and memoirs. The whole treatment of *Wuthering Heights* is a revolutionary blowing away of the fog of unreal sentimentality that had been obfuscating the book; a useful human meaning stands clear. Q.D.L. chose to illustrate her diagnosis of Catherine by a comparison of her to the similarly "enchanting" but deadly Kate in Henri-Pierre Roché's French novel *Jules et Jim*. The analogy was thought a scandalous impertinence by Q.D.L.'s detractors, but it did no harm (she did *not*, *pace* her critics, claim that Roché had been influenced by Brontë, for she herself had elicited information to the contrary from Roché's widow) and in fact later provided useful ammunition for those interested in deflating the overestimation of the film *Jules et Jim*.

Save Dickens, no Victorian novelist is accorded such large attention by Q.D.L. as Austen and the Brontës. A 1967 introduction to *Silas Marner* is her only piece devoted to George Eliot, whose major works, of course, had been discussed by F.R.L. in *The Great Tradition* (1948). But Q.D.L. had a wide and catholic taste in the fiction of her period, and her writings are full of glancing appreciations of such secondary but rewarding figures as Elizabeth Gaskell and Anthony Trollope. She clearly enjoyed both, but was perhaps held back by their low estimate in the *Scrutiny* ambiance from a full confrontation. She is, however, skilled at extracting from minor careers filled with hack work the one fully wrought achievement: Mrs. Inchbald's *A Simple Story*; Gissing's *New Grub Street*; Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Helbeck of Bannisdale*; and, most delightfully, Mrs. Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*. Q.D.L.'s 1969 introduction to the Oliphant novel, first published in 1865-66, resurrected a remarkable figure. (When Q.D.L. tips a curiosity, it proves worth a look; when Virago reprints somebody, it's a tossup.) Mrs. Oliphant was a Scotswoman, prolific novelist and critic, and heroic struggler against a train of misfortunes. The men of the family tended toward fecklessness. Comments Q.D.L.: "First-hand experience of the realities of human nature is always useful to a novelist, but no wonder that in her novels it is women who are generally the admirable, or at worst the efficient, characters, while the men, unsatisfactory in all sorts of ways, have to be managed for their own good." The novel in question is an ironic comedy about Lucilla Marjoribanks, a small-town doctor's daughter of formidable intellect, charm, and appetite for power forced by social limitations on her sex to exercise only indirect domination. It is one of the gems of the period. Q.D.L. articulates her enthusiasm for the work in familiar ways. First, she places it in a line of descent and subsequent influence. There "must," she asserts, be a missing link between Jane Austen's Emma and George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, heroine of *Middlemarch*—some character who might bring to bear on "Victorian provincial-town and county society the same acute and unsentimental critical mind that had produced *Emma* in the Regency period." Before *Middlemarch*, Eliot had never dealt ironically with an ironic heroine. Having posited the link, Q.D.L. pointed to *Miss Marjoribanks*. As usual, nay-sayers have tried to "disprove" the suggested genealogy (cf. Q.D.L.'s *Lady Susan-Mansfield Park* and *Wuthering Heights-Jules et Jim* family trees)

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but it is in any case for Q.D.L. only an instrument for investigating a book, a life, a society. As usual, in the grip of enthusiasm she declares the work at hand to be nonpareil. Lucilla is "more entertaining, more impressive and more likeable" than Emma or Dorothea, for, whereas "Emma is the victim of illusions based on vanity and snobbishness, Lucilla is more interesting in that she really has insight, power, capacities and tactical skills. . . . Emma is a straightforward case of a basically conventional girl, but spoilt . . . Lucilla is very different." And as to George Eliot's Dorothea in comparison to Lucilla: "Mrs. Oliphant evidently felt quite as strongly as George Eliot did later in *Middlemarch* the waste Victorian society caused by assuming that a lady was incapable outside domestic duties. . . . Unlike George Eliot, Mrs. Oliphant really has grasped the nettle—created a girl who is a real test for showing [her society's] cruel shortcomings." But Q.D.L. insists at once on bracing and complicating qualifications: "We have reason to conclude that Mrs. Oliphant's purpose in writing this novel was to campaign against false Victorian values where women are concerned. Not that she was at all in favour of the kind of emancipation of women that John Stuart Mill stood for, being, like Miss Gertrude Bell and other outstanding Victorian ladies, opposed to the Women's Rights movement." Q.D.L. concludes her tribute to this novel with an unusual bit of fancy: "We can imagine Jane Austen reading *Miss Marjoribanks* with enjoyment and approval in the Elysian Fields."

At this point, I want to look at Q.D.L.'s late lecture (it is in Volume 3) to a boys' school on "Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century." Much in it amounts to a kind of credo. In a chipper mood, she opens by saying, "Well, I'm very glad to be back in a school with boys again," and explains that she was "co-educated, from the cradle to the grave, so to speak," and found herself "deeply disappointed" by her coevals in Girton College. All she had found there to admire were the elderly women dons, who had all been educated by men—"by brothers and fathers and uncles, often supplemented by visiting masters to teach them art and music, because of course there hadn't been any high schools for them to go to or any qualified women teachers to teach them." Those dons, it dawned on her, were of "the same breed" as the great women writers of the nineteenth century, whose creative powers were "equal to those of men beyond any argument." Why is it, she asks, that "in a span of a century or more the achievement of women as writers . . . was established and then fell away?" Her answers are as complex and compelling as . . . a good novel. First, there *were* family libraries (examples from Trollope and Austen and Wharton), but they exist no longer. She remembers here her own home, where "the arts, poetry and literature, music and mathematics, and philosophy were recognized as *the* things that mattered most" (this touching testimony ought to be included, surely, in any account of Q.D.L. and her family). Second, there *was* conversation, "a real intellectual activity as well as performing an important social function" (examples from Austen and Mrs. Humphrey Ward). Third came the practice of "writing long, detailed letters meant to be read aloud" (example from Harriet Martineau, who was translating Tacitus and Petrarch at sixteen). Q.D.L. contrasts this variously fertile environment, seedbed of great writing, with the "ambience and assumptions in which educated women have been reared since the movement for female emancipation." She tells of a "clever girl student" seeing her breastfeed her baby and exclaiming in horror. She adduces the story as "only one instance of indoctrination that has largely cut educated women off from the first-hand sources of experience, sympathetic human experience, and the attitudes to the springs of life behind everyday living that fed the woman novelist of the past with insight, sympathy and understanding." Well aware that Austen, Eliot, and the Brontës were not mothers, Q.D.L. cites from their utterances proofs of attitudes very different from the clever girl student's. She then glances at later examples of women in and around literature:

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Frieda Lawrence ("a criminally irresponsible mother and a heartless wife"); Vita Sackville-West; Virginia Woolf (whose "very real talent was simply ruined, not merely impoverished, by the society she was part of" and whose only lasting work is *To the Lighthouse*, because it is "rooted in her own childhood"). If hard on modern women, Q.D.L. is no fool for men, clearly stating: "Now there is no doubt who is responsible for this state of affairs. Women are produced in response to what men demand at any given time. . . . Bloomsbury woman was the comate of Bloomsbury man, who wanted a partner in irresponsibility. Women's Lib. woman can hardly be the answer to any man's needs, but is more in the nature of a nemesis. Whatever its merits there is one thing we can be sure of—it will never produce a major woman novelist." Q.D.L.'s lecture is an involving text, suppler and more inquiring than might appear from quotation, a fond meditation on the sources of literary and familial health. Her voice is alive with nobility and idealism and she shows herself willing (unlike, for example, her husband) to adduce her own life experience to flesh out treatment of her concerns—and in this, dare I say, she displays a superiority of the female sensibility. At such moments Q.D.L. seems herself to be like a Victorian novelist, but one who came late and did her work in such fragmentary and allusive modernist genres as essay and introduction. Criticism like this, like Eliot's, like F. R. Leavis's, like Wilson's, like Bloom's, is literature.

What might seem a specialized interest surfaces in four or five essays by Q.D.L. in Volume 3 that deal with the nineteenth-century novel of religious controversy. Novels were full then of issues of belief, not just Protestantism vs. Catholicism, but High vs. Low Church, Establishment vs. Dissent, and so on in a kaleidoscope of permutations. Trollope's Barchester series merely takes as explicit subject what provides the weather, so to speak, of many works. Q.D.L., as "one who is not and never has been either a Protestant or an Anglican or a Roman Catholic or a Nonconformist," sets out to map "these old unhappy far-off things and battles of long ago" in the very spirit of the novels themselves, that is, empirically and impartially looking at the effect of belief upon behavior and only thence, in true English style, judging its sanity and usefulness for life. In the early years of the century, the disenfranchised Catholics were pitied by Dickens and Gaskell and Disraeli, but, with the rise of the Oxford Movement and the re-establishment of the English Catholic hierarchy and the growing agitation for Home Rule in Catholic Ireland, fear and animus against Catholicism began to be expressed in English fiction, or at least by sympathetic characters therein. Q.D.L. takes the Irish cue for an exhaustive, and archaeologically fascinating, survey of the Anglo-Irish novel, especially early ones by Carleton, the Banim brothers, Gerard Griffin—all Catholic—and one as late as 1925 by the Protestants Somerville and Ross. The novelist she effectively underrates here is Trollope, whose early Anglo-Irish novels are uneven but full of life and typicality and whose somewhat later *Castle Richmond*, unmentioned at all by Q.D.L., is a forgotten masterpiece, boldly and with impartiality of sympathy interweaving a story of a failed courtship among the gentry with the unmitigated horrors of the famine—it stretches the very boundaries of the Victorian novel. In the Anglo-Irish novels Q.D.L. relishes the "Anglo-Irish language, with all its wit and humour" and "tradition of elegant understatement . . . and callous glee in cruelty"—all told, a rich native idiom raised to high art. The novels tend to deal with the decay of the Big House or the destruction by feud or famine of the peasantry. Romeo-and-Juliet cross-confessional marriages, often unhappy, occur. Q.D.L. is alert, as usual, to expose lurking unexamined sentimentalities and pieties, here especially those presupposing a noble peasantry upheld by a disinterested Church against oppressing English gentry. Touchy about the English, Q.D.L. endorses Somerville and Ross in seeing "as sinister the conscienceless exploitation of the poor by the Irish priesthood." Approving fairness toward

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Catholics where she finds it in the (largely Protestant, after all) novels, Q.D.L. clearly regards Catholicism itself as something not worth bothering about, especially since she sees it pictured in so many novels as the enemy of marriage. But she does fascinatingly demonstrate the centrality of religious belief in the fiction of the time. She has not wasted her time belletristically chasing after examples of fox-hunting or gardening in Victorian fiction.

Volume 2 of the essays, entitled *The American Novel and Reflections on the European Novel*, is the weakest of the three, although it contains some good things, especially on American literature. Q.D.L.'s 1951 Hawthorne essay, which likens him to Tolstoy, concentrated on his technique, poetic rather than allegorical, in masterpieces like "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and *The Blithedale Romance*. It got Hawthorne right and made him available. Her 1938 Wharton essay showed a similar sure touch in singling out *The Custom of the Country* even over *The House of Mirth* and in a prolonged confrontation of Wharton with the greater power of George Eliot. On Melville, Q.D.L. wrote a piece sympathetic to the embittered allegories of *The Piazza Tales* and *The Confidence-Man*, but she asked critically whence came the Melvillean despair of life. Locating its origin in the cultural unresponsiveness of a "pioneer society," she placed it by comparison with Solzhenitsyn, who was able to draw, even in the hell of *The First Circle*, upon the sustaining memories and vestigial presences of literature and music and religion—consolations denied Melville.

James Q.D.L. wrote on only marginally, perhaps deferring to F.R.L.'s intense interest in him in *The Great Tradition* and elsewhere. What attention Q.D.L. pays James reveals an unsettling aspect. Early essays appreciate James, reserving scorn for the callow pomposities of James's "critics" like David Garnett and Stephen Spender. But she grows impatient later with James, especially with what she perceives to be his anti-English bias. She mounts nibbling raids against the novelist, assigning priority and superiority in treatment of Americans in England to Trollope and superiority in treating English life altogether to George Eliot. Q.D.L.'s late treatment of James seems to echo, in a quieter and less obsessed key, F.R.L.'s late shadowboxing with another American, Eliot, as he took back now this, now that, now a third laurel leaf awarded earlier in days of admiration. There was always a certain edginess, however faint, in Q.D.L.'s relation to American literature in the nineteenth century; with later American writing she totally fails in sympathy and even, it seems, familiarity. She never mentions Cather. She seems to have had a vague idea that Dreiser was a slob, Fitzgerald a snob, Faulkner a gangster (did someone once summarize *Sanctuary* for her?), and there's an end on't. She does like Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution* (as who doesn't?), but just because of its unsparing diagnosis of an America incapable by definition of culture.

Q.D.L. was a geyser of opinions and theories and data on all things fictional and was therefore all too ready to leap at Professor Singh's invitation to lecture in Belfast, in the last year of her life, on the defining peculiarities of the English and of the Anglo-English and of the American and of the French and of the Italian and of the Russian novel. After what she felt as a lifetime of private suffering and thwarted public opportunity, she had much to say, and it is all reprinted by Professor Singh. The lectures on the French and and on the Italian novel are hasty and superficial, judging both traditions to have suffered from the separation of the classes and the deformations caused by Catholicism, in contrast to the wholesome, Protestant, class-mingling, novel-nurturing, green world of England. These brisk *tours d'horizon* excited the scorn of John Updike in a *New Yorker* review of Volume 2 [3] —a scorn untempered by any compensating apprehension of the magnitude of her ac-

3 "The Virtues of Playing Cricket on the Village Green," by John Updike; *The New Yorker*, July 30, 1990, pages 85-89.

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complishment elsewhere. He seems to think she never wrote on Dickens and that she practiced something called "image-by-image New Criticism" and that "poetic drama" means the same thing as "poetry," which in turn can be supremely exemplified in fiction by the footprint of Crusoe's Man Friday. The whole performance, disappointingly from Mr. Updike, was a merely typical parade of ignorant *New Yorker* condescension.

Q.D.L.'s national surveys are somewhat redeemed by her meditation on the Russian novel, wherein she finds the tradition of Pushkin and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy to have been a literal lifesaver in the prison that is modern Russia: "The image of life as a prison or the State as imprisoning seems to occur naturally to Russian novelists for good reasons. . . . The genius of the great Russian novelists is to reveal to us life in its fullness, by confronting life with death, and thus deduce the answer to the question: 'What do men live by?'" Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn have been able to "explain what has happened to Russia since 1917 in human terms" precisely because they are in living touch with the names mentioned above.

Russian literature leads into the last of Q.D.L.'s major writings I shall notice: her contributions to *Dickens the Novelist*, that collaboration in which F.R.L. wrote chapters on *Dombey and Son*, *Hard Times*, and *Little Dorrit*, while Q.D.L. discussed *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and the Dickens illustrations. Dickens is seen by both as a profound analyst of Victorian civilization, as the supreme English novelist—in fact, "the Shakespeare of the novel."

Q.D.L.'s fascinating study of the Dickens illustrations showed the literary usefulness to Dickens of a tradition of popular, ethical visualizing that led from Hogarth through Gillray to Dickens's two best illustrators, Cruikshank and "Phiz." It was only by the time of *Great Expectations* that Dickens's art had evolved, in its growing interiority and unliteralness, beyond the possibility of being satisfactorily illustrated.

Her chapter on *Great Expectations* is imperially titled "How We Must Read 'Great Expectations'"—how Q.D.L. infuriates contemporary apostles of openness, fretful misreading, and "polyvalency"! It is largely and brilliantly devoted to exposing the modern cant about how Pip should have rejoiced in his working-class origins and should never have had the ambition to be a gentleman in the first place. She confidently shows the ideal of the gentleman to have been a necessary and humane one, if debased in the world of *Great Expectations*. (Q.D.L. had a fine nose for Marxizing—as well as other—abstractions and the harm they do in life and literature. She would not have been surprised by the greenhouse of bizarrely crossbred abstractions that passes for professional criticism today.)

In *Bleak House*, which she sees as Dickens's masterpiece, Q.D.L. shows Dickens creating the interconnected rottenness of civilization from top (Chesney Wold) to bottom (Jo) but at the same time coming to admire, almost in spite of himself, "the beauty, dignity, decorum and continuity that the great house represented." Again Q.D.L. shows art subverting the clichéd or stock feeling or response—here, the clichés of the novelist's own Radicalism. She points with urgency to the haunting writing in *Bleak House*—"poetic, non-rational without being whimsical, alive with humour without being arch or playful, suggestive of metaphorical implications, and with moving overtones"—and she illustrates what she means. Anyone who read *Bleak House* when quite young will have felt in it just that atmosphere, which then seemed a sort of magical emanation from the pages. Magic, we see, is hard work.

(Edmund Wilson had done ground-breaking work on Dickens in the essay cited earlier, despite being hamstrung by his two creeds, psychology and socialism. He built too much upon the "neurotic" and "traumatic" experiences of Dickens's childhood, as if the novelist's whole great art was basically an exorcism of the blacking warehouse. And he saw the governing images of the late novels—fog and jail—as metaphorized sociology. He dismisses *David Copperfield* as "the poem

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of the loves and fears and wonders of childhood." Still, it is a living appreciation, as is George Orwell's 1939 "Charles Dickens," in which he speaks of reading *David Copperfield* at age nine and imagining it had been written by a child, so intelligible was its presentation of the child's "mental atmosphere." And aside from these, and perhaps Chesterton, there was, until the Leavises —and perhaps to an extent *because* of F.R.L.'s belittling remarks about Dickens in *The Great Tradition*—little nourishment for the general reader.)

It is on *David Copperfield* that Q.D.L. writes most memorably; her extended treatment seems to me one of her stellar things. She writes of the book as a many-sided investigation into the pathologies of and corrective possibilities for man-woman relationships in its time. David, forming his image of Woman from his mother, acquiesces in the Victorian assumption that a loving heart is better than wisdom and is "always looking for her [his mother's] image, a pettish, willful, childish, loving playmate." He finds her first in Em'ly and then in Dora. "Idealizing immaturity stabilized it and inhibited maturity in women," but men's urge thus to idealize sprang from "a real emotional need for men living in the world that the nineteenth century became. . . . Of course, the dilemma was that the qualities needed in a satisfactory wife (as efficient household manager and mother) were of a conflicting kind with the other need [for a doting pet]." Q.D.L. sees Betsey Trotwood's angular and excessively unromantic rationality as a complementary deformation to Dora's. The sour, spoiled Rosa Dartle, in tandem with the cold lust of Steerforth, makes yet another distorted erotic configuration. Fallen Em'ly is a failure of Dickens's, a concession to popular sentimentality and to the sentimentalist in him; Dickens did not bother to imagine what a real-life version would be like. But Dickens was realistic in portraying the psychotic side of her uncle Daniel Peggotty's ostensibly noble but in fact "terrifying possessive power." Micawber, though strictly irrelevant to the marriage theme, is invaluable in the book for the joy and artful play he imports. Q.D.L. compares him amusingly to Joyce, who, she declares, had Micawber's "swagger, the shameless assurance in drawing on the resources of others, and the eternal impecuniosity, as well as the gift for language." (This typically English impertinence—not too different from Virginia Woolf on Joyce —is Q.D.L.'s longest remark on Joyce.) Q.D.L. responds to a student complaint that Dickens ought to have shown realistically the misery of a family with such an improvident father and husband by explaining that "Dickens was not writing *Crime and Punishment* or a tract or even a naturalistic novel." Critics of the Leavises' "Puritanism" ought to remember this exchange.

But whom, I hope I hear you asking, did *David Copperfield* influence in a decisive but hitherto unremarked way and indeed in some ways surpass, although common opinion would not have it so? The wonted binary constitution of Q.D.L.'s thinking did not fail here. The complement to *David Copperfield*, as is quite satisfactorily proven, is *War and Peace*. Tolstoy revered Dickens, this book in particular, and drew upon it largely for what he called the domestic side of *War and Peace*, which opens with Prince Andrew miserable in marriage to a Dora-like figure, Lisa, "beautiful, gay and childlike." But Q.D.L. contrasts the unlikelihood of Prince Andrew's having contracted such a marriage with the fully detailed genetic, environmental, and psychological factors impelling David toward Dora. Both Lisa and Dora die. David replaces Dora with the vague and unreal Agnes, but Tolstoy, greater than Dickens here, is able to create Natasha, who grows successfully and vitally from child to woman in a fulfilling marriage. Tolstoy was, then, "able to formulate and dramatize convincing positives of Dickens's negatives." But Tolstoy still strangely remained in Dickens's debt for the idea of a good marriage: "It may have struck some of Tolstoy's other readers, as it has always done me, that the Victorian ideal of marriage is unexpected, almost disconcertingly so, in its context of *War and Peace* and from the pen of a Russian

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aristocrat. The marriage of Nicholas Rostov with Princess Mary, the alternative happy marriage of Pierre's and its complement, is a realistic version of David's second marriage, and Nicholas Rostov's feelings for his wife —also an angel-wife—are those of David for his Agnes." But Q.D.L. will not repose on that insight (embedded as always in her work in a discussion of minute literary particulars—she is no theoretician à la Northrop Frye) for she is thinking at full stretch about the nature of collaborative marriage—her great and constant subject: "Tolstoy as novelist incarnates the Victorian ideal of Woman, the Victorian ideal of Marriage . . . there is no question as yet of the emancipation of woman either from domesticity or from male dominance. . . . For Pierre, we are shown, the source of values is not a Victorian idealization of Woman but for him it exists in the disinterested life of the spirit, shown in the artist's, scientist's, and philosopher's spheres of mind and vocation. And it is for this, we are told, that Natasha respects as well as loves him." Clearly for Q.D.L. a sharing in the "disinterested life of the spirit" is a necessary aspect of post-Natasha Woman, although she has also eloquently pointed to the perils awaiting post-Natasha Womanhood. Here Q.D.L. exhibits a mind freely, exuberantly, but responsibly at play in seemingly the inmost workshops of the novelists themselves. Yes, she convinces me, this is truly what these great novels are at heart about (in the relevant parts, anyway); this is *why* they got written. John Bayley's 1966 *Tolstoy and the Novel* is, by contrast, quite skimpy on this domestic side of Tolstoy, although he is stronger and more inward on that tingling sense of self—*samodovolnost*, he calls it—that Tolstoy's male heroes feel, especially at moments of action.

Q.D.L. finds in Micawber the original of Anna Karenina's brother Steve, "a more reprehensible Micawber to whom everything is forgiven, even by the serious and high-minded Levin, because he increased everyone's enjoyment of life and was lovable."

A gathering of short, ad hoc reviews from *Scrutiny* closes Volume 3. A finely balanced assessment of E. M. Forster's *Abinger Harvest* sits alongside definitive dismissals of Dorothy Richardson, Aldous Huxley (*Eyeless in Gaza* being the occasion), and Dorothy Sayers (*Gaudy Night* is the occasion here but, though I laugh at Q.D.L.'s sallies, I admit I love the book's Oxford romanticism and high-flown courtship. The Leavises were allergic to Oxford. I expect we'd disagree about Waugh, too.)

I had thought of ending with Q.D.L.'s words on Jane Austen as applying to her as well: "This is not a comforting conclusion, but it is the truth of life, and we must not expect comfort from Miss Austen. We go to her to be alerted and braced." And they are obviously appropriate. But then I remembered the time when, as a graduate student, I discovered the bound volumes of *Scrutiny* in the stacks. I ought to have been studying Thucydides, but day after day I devoured *Scrutiny* volume by volume. And the name I found I kept hoping to find and always received delight and surprise from, when encountered, was that of Q. D. Leavis. So I will risk impertinence in my turn by applying to her as writer her words on Anna Karenina's brother: "[She] increased everyone's enjoyment of life and was lovable."

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The art of Ford Madox Ford

by Bruce Bawer

There are great authors whose lifework one could read in an afternoon. In the case of Ford Madox Ford—even assuming that one could gather his essays, reviews, editorials, and all eighty-odd of his books in one place—it would take at least a day simply to sort through them and to begin working out some sense of the shape of his career. To be sure, one need not go to such trouble in order to read Ford's best writings: for virtually everybody who has written about him since his death in 1939 has noted that the highlights of his *oeuvre* are *The Good Soldier* (1915)—which is not only Ford's best novel but one of the major English novels of the twentieth century—and the splendid tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924-28). Yet even these achievements, despite the high regard in which they are held in some quarters, have never been as familiar to serious readers as they ought to be; and one cannot help thinking that Ford's sheer productivity, his longtime reputation as a literary jack-of-all-trades, is at least partly to blame for this relative neglect. Certainly, for a fervent admirer of *The Good Soldier*, the profoundly dispiriting experience of sitting in a library and paging one's way through the mediocre books that make up the bulk of Ford's legacy can help one to understand why his contemporaries might well have had the notion of him as a literary hack so firmly fixed in their minds that it was simply impossible for them to conceive of his writing a masterpiece.

And yet he did write at least one masterpiece. Indeed, one of the most remarkable things about Ford was that if he was among the century's most indefatigable manufacturers of middlebrow fiction, he was also among its most eloquent exponents and gifted practitioners of high literary art, a man whose gods were Turgenev, Flaubert, and Maupassant. One might describe his devotion to art as a birthright: born Ford Madox Hueffer in 1873 (he changed his surname in 1919), he was the son of the German-born composer and music critic Francis Hueffer, a grandson of the Pre-Raphaelite artist Ford Madox Brown (who had been born in France), and a nephew of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (in his twenties he would publish biographical studies of both Brown and Rossetti), and was raised, as he once explained, "to believe that humanity divided itself into two classes—those who were creative artists and those who were merely the stuff to fill graveyards." (The maxim found its way into several of his books.) Indeed, as the English critic Alan Judd writes in his new biography,[1] Ford and his cousins "were intended for artistic and literary genius and were not supposed to be content with anything else."

From an early age, accordingly, Ford—who considered his childhood "moral torture," who grew up despising "the middle Victorian . . . bearded Great," and whose immense productivity may owe something to

1 *Ford Madox Ford*, by Alan Judd; Harvard University Press, 471 pages, $27.50.

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an overachiever mentality induced by his family's partiality to his older brother, Oliver—set about creating. When his classmates at the Praetorius School in Folkestone proceeded to university, Ford began publishing his first books: a fairy story at seventeen, a novel at eighteen, a collection of poems at nineteen. By age twenty, he had published five volumes. Not that his life was all writing: at twenty he married one Elsie Martindale, by whom he fathered two daughters, and with whom he lived for a dozen-odd years in Kent (where his friends and neighbors included Henry James, H. G. Wells, Stephen Crane, and Joseph Conrad), then in Sussex and London (where he suffered a nervous breakdown and, in 1908-9, edited the short-lived *English Review*); in 1910, estranged from Elsie, he moved for a time to Germany, where he secured an invalid divorce and an equally invalid marriage to his mistress, the writer Violet Hunt (who, in a highly publicized case, was sued by Elsie for using Ford's name), and became involved, during the months before the First World War, in the Imagist movement. Shell-shocked in the Battle of the Somme, he was separated from Violet and in the years *entre deux guerres* lived with one Stella Bowen (by whom he had a third daughter), conducted an affair with the writer Jean Rhys, and then began a long-term relationship with the artist Janice Biala, with whom he lived during the Twenties in Toulon and Paris (where he edited *the transatlantic review* in 1924-25) and during the Thirties in both France and America, becoming a writer in residence and then an honorary professor at Michigan's Olivet College.

It was a crowded and colorful life, during which Ford—a large, stocky man noted for his sensitivity, sentimentality, snobbishness, generosity, and Francophilia—lived for decades at the center of the literary world, taking walks in the Kentish countryside with James, sitting in Paris cafés with Hemingway, and exchanging witty letters with Pound (who addressed him as "Old Fordie" and "Gruberroruntopus"). But his principal activity was always writing: throughout his life he was a veritable book factory, churning out everything from art-critical monographs like *Hans Holbein* and *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* to literary-critical omnibuses with such titles as *The English Novel: From the Earliest Days to Joseph Conrad* and *The March of Literature from Confucius' Day to Our Own*, from historical romances like *The Portrait* (which takes place during the reign of George I) and *A Little Less Than Gods* (which is set in Napoleonic times) to such modern-dress novels as *Mr. Fleight* (a political satire which at times recalls Trollope's *Phineas Finn*), *A Call* (a high-society confection in pseudo-Jamesian prose), and *Vive le Roy* (a thriller whose broadly sardonic treatment of its American-in-Paris protagonist reminds one of Sinclair Lewis). During the first decade of the century, moreover, Ford collaborated with Conrad—whom he revered, and from whom he claimed to have "learned all I know of Literature"—on two light novels, *The Inheritors* and *Romance* (a third, *The Nature of a Crime*, composed during the same period, was not published as a book until 1924), and during the next decade collaborated on two nonfiction books, *The Desirable Alien* and *Zeppelin Nights*, with Violet Hunt.

Ford wrote so many now-forgotten novels, indeed, that one approaches them with the thought that somewhere in so large a body of work by a man capable of writing *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End* must be an undiscovered treasure. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case. Most of these novels, whether historical or contemporary, are run-of-the-mill specimens of the popular fiction of the day, the characters slickly conceived, the prose merely serviceable, the vision routine. The most remarkable thing about them is that a man who wrote one of the most extraordinary novels of the century could have written so many downright ordinary ones. Among the many things an American reader, anyway, takes note of is that, while *The Good Soldier*'s narrator is a thoroughly convincing Philadelphian, several of Ford's other novels feature less plausible stateside characters who speak

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largely in slangy Americanisms. (A few lines of dialogue on a single page of *When the Wicked Man*, for instance, contain the following locutions: "swell," "darned," "lousy," "kid," "No, siree!", "the works," "a mighty long offing," and "hired dicks.")

Some of Ford's minor novels, to be sure, have their champions. But his most accomplished work of fiction, other than *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End*, may be his trilogy *The Fifth Queen* (1906-8), which centers on Henry VIII's penultimate wife, Katharine Howard, and which Conrad called "the swan song of historical romance." Ford did not choose this subject lightly: he had long been interested in Henry VIII, whose reign he saw as marking the start of the modern world and of whom he once intended to write a biography; it was during the reign of Henry VIII, he argued in his book *The Spirit of the People*, that England was transformed from Europe's "laughing-stock" into its "arbiter." Ford's entire literary career might be understood as an attempt to understand the meaning of the words *modern* and *English*, and in the Katharine Howard trilogy he plainly attempts to imagine some of the human drama behind the founding of modern England; it is not surprising, therefore, that the trilogy is considerably more serious and substantial than most of his other historical efforts. If a later Tudor-era novel, *The Young Lovell* (1913), reads like a bad imitation of Sir Walter Scott—its action improbable, its characters (among them a witch with a crutch) ludicrously picturesque, and its attempt at period language clumsy, self-conscious, and artificial—*The Fifth Queen* and its successors, *Privy Seal* and *The Fifth Queen Crowned*, are composed in a rich, fastidious style that effectively but undistractingly suggests the English of the day, and contain a number of compelling characters. Chief among them is Henry's Privy Seal, Thomas Cromwell, whom Ford considered "the great man" of the Tudor period, and who in his view "wedded England into one formidable whole" and instituted the pragmatic methods of government that the men under Queen Elizabeth would successfully follow. The trilogy offers arresting glimpses of England on the verge of modernity, with Catholic patterns of thought giving way to Protestant ones and an old man's reverence for the knightly code of honor giving way to the Machiavellian thinking of younger men.

Yet the trilogy has a major failing, and it lies in the heroine herself—a flat character who sees moral issues in black and white, who tends to react rather than to act, and whose intense allegiance to the Old Faith (which supposedly motivates her every action) doesn't convince. Ford's queen is rather difficult to square with the historical record: though the real Katharine was the aristocratic niece of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, and was probably guilty of the debauchery for which she was beheaded, Ford sees her as an exceedingly pious, naïve, and saintly country girl who is taken aback by the intrigues at court and especially by the sneaky behavior of the cleric, Bishop Stephen Gardiner, whom she has long revered. Strangely enough, however, Ford also sees her as cocky, hot-tempered, scheming, and murderous—and the two sides don't quite fit together. If Katharine is very aware of social station, moreover, referring to Cromwell scornfully as a "brewer's son," she is also weirdly indifferent to the rank of the king and his handlers. Reading *The Fifth Queen*, one wonders about one thing after another: Why does Katharine, of all people, become a focus of conspiracy for everyone immediately upon her arrival at court? What, given all that her fellow Catholics have suffered during Henry's reign, is going through her head when she speaks recklessly to the king's men, and why does she take so long to realize that to behave impudently with them is to play with fire? What, when she agrees to urge Princess Mary to write a controversial letter to her cousin the Emperor, are Katharine's motives? Admiration for the king? Her Catholic faith? Her enmity for Cromwell? The answer is far from clear. The king, on the other hand, is complex and convincing, and Ford does a fine job, especially in Henry's case, of showing how the "hard world" drives essentially

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good natures to harsh deeds. Though the plot of *The Fifth Queen* is, ultimately, no less silly and contrived than that of many of Ford's historical romances, it often rises considerably above the level of those books.

Perhaps Ford's least familiar writing is his poetry, several collections of which appeared over the years; volumes entitled *Collected Poems* were published in 1913 and 1936. Ford was far from a great poet, but the clarity, directness, and precision of his best prose and verse strongly influenced the doctrines of Imagism, which in turn played a pivotal role in the development of modern poetry. "I would rather talk about poetry with Ford Madox Hueffer than with any man in London," said Pound, who credited Ford with the Imagist principle that "poetry must be *as well written as prose*." Ford's own attitude toward his verse is elucidated in the preface to his earlier *Collected Poems*:

> the writing of verse hardly appears to me to be a matter of work: it is a process, as far as I am concerned, too uncontrollable. From time to time words in verse have come into my head and I have written them down, quite powerlessly and without much interest, under the stress of certain emotions.

This is not, shall we say, a deeply serious poet speaking. Given Ford's nonchalance in these matters, however, it is surprising that some of his poems are as good as they are. Ford's poems range from a few lines to several pages in length, and take a variety of forms: there are sonnets, *vers libre* dialogues, Yeatsian "songs" in multiple voices, lyrics of love and war. These poems tend toward the loose and talky, and are most often gentle, civilized, and rather sad, the most characteristic tone being a sort of worldly wistfulness. Even Ford's war verse, as illustrated by these wistful lines from *Poems Written on Active Service* about a troop-train ride through the English countryside, is rarely bitter or cynical:

> Running between the green and the grain
> Something like the peace of God
> Descended over the hum and the drone
> Of the wheels and the wine and the buzz of the talk.
> And one thought:
> "In two days' time we enter the Unknown,
> And this is what we die for!"

For what do we die? For what do we live? These questions are not far from the surface of many a Ford poem, including "On Heaven," which at several pages' length envisions paradise (which he situates in Provence). Time and again, Ford ponders the purpose of life's struggle, now with a Kiplingesque muscularity ("Yes, what's the use of striving on? / And what's to show all is done?") and now with a Hardyesque homeliness: "better / To lie for ever, a warm slug-a-bed / Or to rise up and bide by Fate and Chance, / The rawness of the morning...?" Perhaps Ford's poetry is best read alongside typical examples of the minor late-Victorian verse against which he and his Imagist cronies were rebelling; to see it in such a context is to appreciate the freshness of his language and the naturalness of his rhythms.

On the whole, Ford's nonfiction books have probably held up better than his fiction and poetry. Some, to be sure, are as lackluster as any of his novels: *Henry James* (1914), for instance, is a textbook example of slapdash writing by a man who, despite his veneration of the Master, would seem to have had little to say about him. But Ford also wrote some fine nonfiction books, and some which, though less than fine, are intermittently interesting and well written. (As Ezra Pound once lamented, much of Ford's best writing is buried here and there in books no one reads.) Some of the finest of these volumes are about places Ford knew and enjoyed, from southern England (*The Cinque Ports*) and southern France (*Provence*) to parts of the eastern United States (*New York Is Not America*). Though these books vary considerably in approach and quality, they all contain evocative descriptions of town and/or country and interesting (if often factitious) historical details and anecdotes about the natives. In all these books Ford con-

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veys his genuine affection for these places, and also communicates a fervent desire to come off as a man of the world, a fellow who would feel at home in a Paris café, a Sussex alehouse, or a Tennessee plantation manse, and who is fluent in the more important modern languages. Often, alas, Ford's tireless attempts to establish his worldliness succeed only in demonstrating the opposite. In his memoir *Return to Yesterday* (1931), for instance, he makes simple mistakes in Spanish and German; just as some of his novels, moreover, go overboard on Americanisms, so his nonfiction books have more than their share of glib generalizations about the States, and of broad, highly debatable Anglo-American contrasts: "In England it is the land that counts first: in America, it has seemed to me it was the people."

Reading in a book like *The Great Trade Route* (1937)—an astonishingly quirky grab-bag of observations about Western civilization that takes as its *point d'appui* a 1934-35 transatlantic journey by Ford and Janice Biala—one can hardly imagine anyone other than Ford writing such a thing: like much of his work, it is both elegant and effusive, charming and outrageously self-indulgent. Perhaps more typical of Ford's better nonfiction, however, are three books that appeared in America as one volume entitled *England and the English*. Leisurely and engaging, low on careful research and fact-checking and high on personality and personal impressions, the books read like a series of ladies' club monologues by a garrulous Edwardian man of letters. If *The Soul of London* (1905) seeks, by means of descriptions of trams and tramps and of quotations from bus drivers, to convey the feel of the British metropolis, *The Heart of the Country* (1906) meticulously evokes the picturesque English countryside and the conversation of rustic folk. Perhaps the most interesting volume of the three is *The Spirit of the People* (1907), wherein Ford seeks to define the nature of the English character. The Englishman's foremost virtue, Ford notes in these pages, is his "general good nature"—his tolerance, optimism, respect for the law, lack of vengefulness; "in no other nature," Ford writes, "are so many of the civic and the practical virtues so worked into the mystical code of life." The Englishman's "great defect," meanwhile, is his "want of sympathetic imagination." These ideas about the English would find their way into both *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End*.

Particularly worth noting, in light of the role of religion in Ford's best fiction, are his remarks about the Englishman's relation to God. "The English official Deity," he writes, "is a just God. But . . . just in the sense only that He rewards the good. The evil He lets slip by him, as the Englishman, remarking 'poor devil,' would let most impotent sinners escape punishment." Ford, who joined the Roman Catholic Church at seventeen—because, said his friend Olive Garnett, he "found poetry in it" and sought "relief from the gospel of perfect indifference to everything"—and who identified himself sometimes as a Catholic and sometimes as an agnostic, is of course talking here about members of the Church of England (as Christopher Tietjens observes in *Parade's End*, Roman Catholics in England are "not quite English"); he even goes so far as to state that Anglicans share

> a frame of mind and not a religion . . . in which, though the ethical basis of Christianity is more or less excellently preserved, the theological conditions remain in a very fragmentary condition. . . . [T]he Englishman is hardly religious at all, since it is not so much the supernatural as the human side of the Deity that has a daily significance for him.

Ford's focus here is less on Anglicanism, per se, than on the English attitude toward religion that helped to shape the national church and that has in turn been partly shaped by it; he aims, in other words, not to denigrate a faith but to understand the psychology of a people. Ford—who was often accused of being more sympathetic to France or Germany than to England, and who professed in a memoir never to have "had a very strong sense of nationality at all," though many of

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his books reflect a preoccupation with the idea of national identity—quite rightly saw Anglicanism as a clue to the character of his native land. The differences between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism figure significantly in his novels: *The Fifth Queen*, *The Good Soldier*, and *Parade's End* all feature married couples in which the husband is an Anglican and the wife a Roman Catholic, the sectarian distinctions in each case reflecting, among other things, a certain divergence of mind and spirit between the two parties.

If a chief merit of Ford's nonfiction is his ability to convey vivid impressions of people and places, one of its great defects is his casual way with factual detail. Ford had little regard for facts, which he routinely denigrated at the expense of subjective impressions. In his later years, he wrote several books of reminiscence—notably *Return to Yesterday* (1931) and *It Was the Nightingale* (1933)—and sometimes combined reminiscence with criticism and biography, as in *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (1924). Manifestly, Ford's goal in each of these books is not to record objective historical data for posterity but to capture, page by page, the feel of various events and encounters. To read a book like *It Was the Nightingale* is to recognize how much Ford influenced Hemingway; for here, as in *A Moveable Feast*, one enters the author's life and consciousness *in medias res* and meanders with him, as it were, through the streets of 1920s Paris, dropping in with him at sundry cafés and ateliers and listening in on his conversations with artists and writers. The style is graceful, the tone intimate and chatty; it is assumed that we are familiar with the lineaments of Ford's career, that we know he lived in such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time, and that he associated with certain immortals of art and literature (whom he generally introduces by their surnames).

There is a good deal of braggadocio in these books: Ford takes pains to let us know how familiar he was with the luminaries and hot spots of the day, to inform us that he gave Conrad the idea for *The Secret Agent* and wrote part of *Nostromo*, and to convince us that he was more famous than he really was. But his egoism is balanced by a willingness to tell stories on himself, by a real interest in other creative folk, and by a deep reverence for the literary art: "The only human activity that has always been of extreme importance to the world is imaginative literature. It is of supreme importance because it is the only means by which humanity can express at once emotions and ideas." Science? "I have always entertained the most vivid distrust for the scientific mind." Politics? "I never took any stock in politics." As for politics in literature, "Galsworthy believed that humanity could be benefited by propaganda for virtue of a Christian order whereas I believed that humanity can only be brought to ameliorate itself if life as it is is presented in terms of an art. And the business of art is not to elevate humanity but to render." Among those writers who rendered to Ford's satisfaction were James and Conrad; but his gallery of admired writers also includes some names less familiar today, among them W. H. Hudson, Miss Braddon (the author of *East Lynne*), and George Moore.

Ford's memoirs are notorious for their factual unreliability, but this characteristic doubtless owes much to his readiness to alter details so that an anecdote might convey, by his lights, a more authentic impression. As Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska once wrote, Ford's recollections "must not be accepted for their literal truth but for their flashes of an essential, one might almost say poetic, validity." On one occasion, for instance, Ford remarked that his latest book had sold twelve thousand copies when it had sold only twelve hundred; he afterward explained the prevarication by saying that his interlocutor had known little about publishing, and would not appreciate precisely what a success the book had been unless the sales figure were multiplied by ten. The point: facts have their place, but in order to impart to an audience the character of a person, the dimensions of an object, or the flavor of an experience—in order, that is, to capture the *truth*—it is often necessary to alter the mere

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facts; such, indeed, is the essence of art. As Alan Judd says, "Ford's eye is on the right effect, not the right fact. . . . [He was] always prepared to create in order to get the right effect." (That it might not be ethically defensible to treat facts this way in a casual conversation as if it were a work of art, in which the creator's right to deceive is tacitly accepted by both parties, does not seem to have bothered Ford overmuch.)

Though it is intended as a serious critical history, Ford's baggy valedictory volume, *The March of Literature* (1938), has much in common with his impressionistic memoirs. Crammed with dubious literary anecdotes and gratuitous autobiographical references (the only difference is that Ford speaks not of "I" or "me" but of "this writer"), this chatty 878-page tome is nonetheless largely redeemed by Ford's real passion for the writers he discusses, by the liveliness of his prose, by the soundness of much of his critical commentary, and by his willingness to express and defend his strong and often idiosyncratic views. (Sample: "Except perhaps for Jane Austen, [Trollope] is the greatest of all specifically English novelists. He is less of an artist than she but he is male, and that counts.") Throughout these pages, Ford comes off as a "village explainer" in the Pound mold, quirky and tangent-happy, a bit condescending, perhaps, toward his intended audience of common readers but sincere in his zeal to acquaint them with the transcendent works of world literature. (Ford was never a critic, really, so much as he was a promoter of things he liked, who could explain sensitively and intelligently why he liked them.) Less self-indulgent—but also less compelling—is Ford's posthumous *A History of Our Own Times* (1988), the first of three projected volumes that covers the years 1870-95, charting such developments as the rise of American industry and the partition of Africa. Why did Ford choose to write about such matters? "We seek," he explains, "to know not only the state of our world in our own time but how it has arrived at the state in which it finds itself." Yet even this book begins with a personal impression: "mention to me the British Raj . . . in India and I will at once see myself being a small boy dragged along unwillingly by an irresistible nurse's hand—I will still see a poster that I was not allowed to look at for long enough because of my nurse's impatience. It represented a fat man in a fez, falling to the ground, his feet above his head. He was Arabi Pasha."

It is said that a writer is as good as his best book, but Ford did not get off lightly for writing so many mediocre ones. Generous though he was to writers whose talent he respected, many of those whom he most admired did not take him very seriously as an author. In *Henry James*, Ford lauded James as "the greatest of living writers and in consequence, for me, the greatest of living men," but James never even bothered to read the book. Conrad, whose genius Ford tirelessly trumpeted, mocked the seriousness with which he took their collaborations. And Hemingway repaid Ford (who had employed him as assistant editor of *the transatlantic review*) by describing him in *A Moveable Feast* as a rather preposterous literary snob who, in his physical grossness, resembled "a well-clothed, up-ended hogshead." Yet that hogshead was the author of a greater novel than Hemingway would ever write. *The Good Soldier*, first published in 1915 and set in Germany, does not even mention the First World War; yet in the sense that it is about estrangement and betrayal, about barriers that can never be crossed, and about the ways in which people destroy themselves and others, it might fairly be described as a "war novel." The book centers on the nine-year friendship of two well-to-do middle-aged couples who live in Europe and spend part of every year in the German resort city of Nauheim. John Dowell, a Philadelphia Quaker, and his wife, the former Florence Hurlbird of Massachusetts, stay in the city, famous for its salt springs, because Florence has a "heart" (that is, cardiac problems); their friends, Captain Edward Ashburnham, an English Anglican, and his wife Leonora (née Powys), an Irish Catholic, come to Nauheim because Edward too has a "heart."

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Dowell, the book's narrator, describes the friendship as "a young middle-aged affair" between two couples of "quite quiet dispositions"; the four of them were "quite good people," he says, and together they shared "nine years of uninterrupted tranquillity."

Those years of tranquility, however, ended in Florence's and Edward's suicides, and it is Dowell's aim, writing during the months following those deaths, to try to make sense of them. This is not easy, for when he thinks about the Ashburnhams now, he realizes (as he admits on the novel's first page) that in a sense he "knew nothing at all about them." Indeed, four pages later he acknowledges further that "I know nothing—nothing in the world—of the hearts of men." Twenty-nine pages after this he is asserting that such ignorance is general: "After forty-five years of mixing with one's kind, one ought to have acquired the habit of being able to know something about one's fellow beings. But one doesn't." And he repeats this contention again and again. On page 155: "Who in the world knows anything of any other heart—or of his own?" On page 203: "the human heart is a very mysterious thing." Needless to say, the human heart does not figure here only as a circulatory organ. Its mystery is one of Ford's constant themes (in a poem entitled "Old Man's Evensong," he laments that "I shall never utter the uttermost secrets aright, / They lie so deep"), and it is clear that he agrees with Dowell that the heart's congenital unknowability is aggravated by "the modern civilized habit—the modern English habit—of taking everyone for granted," a habit which afflicts certain civilized Americans of English ancestry, like the Dowells, as surely as it does the English themselves. People like himself and Edward, Dowell says, peg each other on first sight as "good people," and fail to look much further; it is for this reason, he suggests, that he was able to remain friends with the Ashburnhams for nine years without realizing that Florence, whose allegedly weak heart had supposedly prevented the consummation of their marriage, was all the time deceiving him about her health (which was, in fact, fine) and was, as Leonora knew, having an affair with Edward—who was also perfectly healthy, and whose affair with Florence was bookended by infatuations with other women.

Yet Ford signals to us constantly that, for all the validity of Dowell's observations about the heart's mystery, there may well be more to this story than meets Dowell's eye—or, more precisely, than he is willing to see. To be sure, the novel can be read "straight," and Dowell's version of events accepted (as it is by Ford's biographer Arthur Mizener) as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But as one reads along, one begins to suspect otherwise—to suspect, that is, that Dowell is an unreliable narrator, unreliable less by virtue of any conscious desire to deceive the reader than by virtue of an unconscious desire to deceive himself. Ford seems to be throwing out plenty of hints that Dowell is working with a world-class set of defense mechanisms: after going on about Florence for pages, Dowell insists that he has "never given her another thought" since her death; of his nine years with her and the Ashburnhams, he says "I don't know how we put in our time." His repeated references to "poor Leonora," "poor Florence," and "poor Edward" suggest that he needs desperately to insist upon the other characters' piteousness in order to keep from feeling unbearably pathetic himself; and his contention that Florence hid an earlier affair from him only because a honeymoon tantrum made her fear his temper is hard not to read as a cuckold's feeble bid at salvaging a little self-respect. The book, Dowell informs us, is several months in the writing, and over the course of that period his testimony undergoes a discernible shift: in the opening pages he says of Florence that "I don't believe that for one minute she was out of my sight, except when she was safely tucked up in bed"; later, though, he corrects himself: Florence was, he now realizes, out of his sight "most of the time." He can even contradict himself from one page to the next: immediately after describing life with the Ashburnhams as tranquil, he describes it as "a prison full of screaming hysterics."

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What did Dowell know and when did he know it? He insists that it was not until after Florence's death that he learned about her affair with Edward; and indeed he consoles himself with the thought that the real truth of the matter lay not in the disagreeable facts that were unknown to him but in his far more pleasant, if mistaken, impression: "If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core and discover its rottenness only in nine years and six months less four days, isn't it true to say that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple?" Yet one gradually comes to suspect that, on some level, Dowell knew for a long time about Florence's infidelity. Consider the visit to Marburg that the two couples take early in the friendship. During the visit, Dowell says, Leonora became visibly upset, which frightened him; he assumed, he says, that Leonora was jealous of Florence and Edward, and he was much relieved when, seemingly about to reveal something to him, she proved to be upset about something else. The reader can conclude only that what Dowell feared was being confronted with facts about Florence and Edward that he didn't want to acknowledge to himself or to have to deal with.

This is not to say that Dowell has absolutely no self-knowledge: his awareness that his subconscious mind has kept certain things hidden from him is indicated by his reference, at one point, to the "inner self" or "dual personality" that "had realized long before that Florence was a personality of paper." Nor does Ford mean to single Dowell out or ridicule him; on the contrary, we are meant to understand that Dowell differs from the rest of us only in degree, not in kind, and that, as even Dowell himself notes in passing, certain "delusions are necessary to keep us going." Defense mechanisms exist for a reason, after all, and self-deception is not necessarily a bad thing: in a sense, the truth is what one's conscious mind thinks it sees, rather than the objective reality to which it is blind. In any event, Ford's purpose here is not to pass some kind of rudimentary moral judgment on his narrator but to *render*. And his method of rendering is a highly impressionistic one; Dowell rambles back and forth in time as one event reminds him of another or inspires comment, and returns to certain events again and again, often changing his testimony. As he says, "when one discusses an affair—a long, sad affair—one goes back, one goes forward. One remembers points that one has forgotten and one explains them all the more minutely since one recognizes that one has forgotten to mention them in their proper places and that one may have given, by omitting them, a false impression." Certainly Ford's selection of such a narrative technique for *The Good Soldier* would appear to point to the fact that the operation of Dowell's mind is very much a principal theme of the book, and that one of the things Ford seeks to render here is the complexity of the human psyche. That one can know and not know something; that, on one level of the mind, one can discover and be devastated by something that one has long known about on another level; that the hearts even of those whom one thinks one knows intimately can be such a mystery that one can discover essential facts about them that shake one to one's very core; and that even when one has confronted and supposedly accepted certain facts, one can continue to deceive oneself, to play subconscious interpretive games: these are among the aspects of human psychology that lie at the heart of *The Good Soldier*. One might almost say that in its preoccupation with the obstacles to human knowledge the novel is a deconstructionist's dream, except that it could not be further in spirit from the romantic nihilism of Derrida and his disciples: implicit on every page is the notion that people matter, that their feelings matter, and that, however formidable a task it may seem, one ought never to cease striving earnestly for meaning and for a more nearly perfect communion with one's fellow man.

All of which rather begs the question: if Dowell blinded himself to Florence's infidelity, why did he do so? There are no unequivocal answers to this question—indeed, Ford doesn't offer the reader any more cer-

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tainty about the ultimate psychological facts of the case than he offers Dowell—but there is much here to ponder. When Dowell first knew her, for instance, Florence "faintly hinted" that "she did not want much physical passion" in marriage, and her aunts hinted (less faintly) that she was no fit match for "a good young man." Yet Dowell gives no indication of having hesitated to marry her. Why? Did he want a wife who would make no sexual demands and/or betray him? The first suggestion that she had a "heart" came during the Atlantic crossing on their honeymoon, when she feigned cardiac pains and Dowell became her uncomplaining nurse: "in the retaining of her in this world I had my occupation, my career, my ambition." (Yet later he claims that "What I wanted mostly was to cease being a nurse-attendant.") Was he, in some odd way, using Florence just as she was using him? He boasts of "the cleanness of my thoughts and the absolute chastity of my life." Did he marry Florence so that he could lead a sexless existence and experience passion vicariously? If so, what does this say about his feelings toward Edward? For surely one of the most striking things about the novel is the contrast between how Dowell speaks of Florence and how he speaks of Edward. For her he shows little affection: "Florence was vulgar; Florence was a common flirt." To be sure, he says of her and the Ashburnhams that "I cannot think any of them wicked," and reflects that she and Edward "were only poor wretches creeping over this earth in the shadow of an eternal wrath." Yet a page later he is vicious: "I hate Florence. I hate Florence with such a hatred that I would not spare her an eternity of loneliness." Only once, in a very curious passage, does he speaks of passionate love for a woman: "the real fierceness of desire, the real heat of a passion long continued and withering up the soul of a man, is the craving for identity with the woman that he loves. He desires to see with the same eyes, to touch with the same sense of touch, to hear with the same ears, to lose his identity, to be enveloped, to be supported."

If Dowell had touched with Florence's hands, of course, he would have touched Edward—who is, as it happens, the object of far more affection than anyone else in the book. Edward had, Dowell tells us, "all the virtues that are usually accounted English": he was "a splendid fellow . . . upright, honest, fair-dealing, fair-thinking," who "carried himself well, was moderate at the table, and led a regular life." He had the English failings also, the principal one being that "there was too much of the sentimentalist about him"—though this fact doesn't diminish our narrator's devotion to his memory, for Dowell (himself an imitation Englishman) is sentimental as well. On the contrary, Dowell's affection for Edward is "so intense that even to this day I cannot think of Edward without sighing" (a remark one recalls later when Dowell, professing to have loved a young woman called Nancy, adds that "I don't mean to say that I sighed about her or groaned" but rather that "I wanted to marry her as some people want to go to Carcassonne"). Are we meant to gather from all this that Dowell's feelings for Edward fall under the category of the love that dare not speak its name? I think not; more likely, we are meant to recognize that serious bonds between human beings take all forms, and that sexuality, in some cases, is largely beside the point. As Dowell himself says: "Of the question of the sex instinct I know very little and I do not think that it counts for very much in a really great passion." One cannot but be reminded of Ford's own life: apparently all his romantic partners were women, but accounts by intimates have suggested that his friendships with certain men, notably Conrad, were as important to him as his marriage or affairs, and that given a choice between sexual and verbal intercourse he would have chosen the latter. "[T]alk," Alan Judd writes, "was to him the final communion of souls." (One suspects that he felt similarly about literary collaboration.) It might be said, indeed, that one of the subjects of this novel is the relation of sexuality to true human intimacy; and there can be little question but that Ford was considerably more interested in the latter than the former.

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One of the exceptional things about *The Good Soldier* is the way its sad story hovers at the brink of absurdity without ever crossing it. Push Dowell a bit further and he turns from a man of great interest and sympathy into a caricature of an otiose, imperturbable Edwardian cuckold. Nor is he the book's only near-absurdity. "It's odd," says someone in Ford's novel *An English Girl* (1907), "how absurd coincidences—silly synchronisations—get into one's life." *The Good Soldier* contains a set of "synchronisations" that are, objectively speaking, highly improbable: over the years between 1899 and 1913, we learn, many key events in Florence's life occurred on her birthday, the fourth of August (which, though Dowell never mentions it, was the date in 1914 on which Britain declared war on Germany). Yet these synchronizations exert a dramatic force that has something, at least, to do with the date's reminder that it is not only for Dowell that life is a matter of tragic detonations lying in wait, of moments in which years are shattered and long ties sundered. Also effective is the book's German setting, which provides a foreign backdrop for Ford's portrayal of the English (and Anglo-American) character in action, and, with war imminent, underlines how quickly friendly turf can become enemy territory.

What's more, Germany is the birthplace of Protestantism, whose breach with Rome Leonora pronounces the "cause of . . . the whole sorrow of the world." It is at Marburg, Dowell reminds us, that "the Reformer [Luther] and his friends met for the first time under the protection of the gentleman that had three wives at once [the landgrave of Hesse] and formed an alliance with the gentleman that had six wives, one after the other [Henry VIII]." It is no coincidence that there is a tacit parallel here between Henry VIII and Edward (an Englishman who has had several extramarital sweethearts in a row) and between the landgrave and Dowell (a Quaker with Pennsylvania Dutch ties who says he would like to be a polygamist). The mention of Henry VIII is especially germane, for Ford sees a significant irony in the fact that modern England and the modern English church—which are personified here by the high-minded, womanizing Edward Ashburnham—had their origin in a high-minded, womanizing king, at once brilliant, devout, and brutal, who wanted a divorce. To Ford, there is a continuum between the psychological and moral complexities of Henry VIII and those of the modern English gentleman, the principled, pietistic, and empire-building "good soldier" who believes in marriage and discreet philandering, who honors his wife and expects the same in return, and who accepts hypocrisy as one of the prices of civilization. (In *Parade's End*, Tietjens says of "good people" in England that "We're always, as it were, committing adultery . . . with the name of Heaven on our lips.") No wonder, then, that Leonora laments the Reformation: in an England more like Catholic Europe, Dowell observes, a woman in her position would secure a divorce "for two hundred dollars paid in the right quarter" and Edward would eventually become a tramp or marry a barmaid.

The Good Soldier has often been viewed as social criticism, and interpreted as an indictment of the "modern" English sensibility embodied by Edward on the brink of the war that would finish it off and make it seem distinctly old-fashioned. Yet it is more accurate, I think, to speak of the novel as a critical consideration of that sensibility which recognizes both its good and bad qualities. For, his criticisms of modern England and Anglicanism notwithstanding, Ford's fiction never seems polemical on the subject. On the contrary, the modern English sensibility comes across throughout as profoundly complex in its morality; the tragedy of *The Good Soldier*, indeed, is that Edward really did manifest many sterling (and distinctively English) qualities, and that they were well-nigh inseparable from those distinctively English failings wherein lay the seeds of his destruction. On a higher level, furthermore, the novel is not merely about the social upheavals of a particular historical moment, or even about the English national character, but about the abiding paradoxes of the human mind and human relations; it is a

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novel in which the Reformation becomes a striking emblem of the painful divisions that Dowell is lamenting when he says: "We are all so afraid, we are all so alone, we all so need from the outside the assurance of our own worthiness to exist." It is, indeed, a wonder of a novel, whose shape, pace, and tone are right on target: like a virtuoso actor in a role he was born to play, Ford creates a narrator whose every gesture and comment, and every leap from one time frame to another, strikes one as totally authentic, and whose voice, perfect in pitch and rhythm, Ford finds in his first sentence and never loses. Ford is a master here at the impressionistic ordering of effects: throughout the book one feels that one is inside not merely another world but another consciousness, and Ford generates interest and builds suspense by peeling away the layers of that consciousness.

Parade's End is also notable for its impressionistic ordering, though the general movement in all four novels is conventionally linear. Most impressive in this regard is the first volume, *Some Do Not . . .* (1924), whose third-person narration shifts its focus from one individual to another and digresses from the main storyline into the characters' musings or memories and back again with the fluidity and stateliness of a classical symphony. The characters' consciousnesses are richly rendered and beautifully differentiated, their relations to and impressions of each other convincingly set forth, and their upper-class, prewar milieu evoked with remarkable effectiveness and economy, so that, even as the story is developing and the tension rising, the reader obtains a wonderfully rich sense of the protagonist and the world he inhabits. That protagonist is Christopher Tietjens, the very model of an English gentleman, gallant and generous, temperate and proper, his mind "a perfect encyclopaedia of exact material knowledge," his character exceptionally free of envy and rancor (though he has the usual prejudices of his time and class); the youngest son of a Yorkshire gentleman, he has "never lied or [done] a dishonorable thing in his life." He belongs to the "class [that] administer[s] the world": when the tetralogy begins in 1912, he is a bright and promising twenty-six-year-old official in the Imperial Department of Statistics ("He was without ambition, but these things would come to him as they do in England") and is headed for Germany to retrieve his beautiful and selfish wife, Sylvia, who has run off with another man. It is Tietjens's very near-perfection that drove Sylvia to adultery; he is too Christ-like for her (it is no coincidence that his name means "bearer of Christ"), and she is rankled by his very readiness to forgive: "there is only one man from whom a woman could take 'Neither I condemn thee' and not hate him more than she hates the fiend! . . ." Such resentment of rectitude helps to explain why, in the ensuing months and years, Tietjens becomes "overwhelmed by foul and baseless rumours" that depict him as the lover of a young suffragette named Valentine Wannop and Sylvia as an injured wife. As Ford observes: "It is, in fact, asking for trouble if you are more altruist than the society that surrounds you." (Just ask his Katharine Howard.)

It is a society that is embarrassed by emotion, a society where one is known by the whiskey one serves and judged by which Oxford or Cambridge college one attended, a society where one's reputation can be ruined by a single bounced check. Ford does a magnificent job of steering Tietjens through this world—introducing him, in turn, into the company of artistic, political, religious, and military figures—and showing how his marital situation affects his membership in what his friend Macmaster calls "the circumspect classes." Underscoring the distance between the supposedly lofty moral code of these classes and the base values and motives that really govern their actions (and that make it possible for a guileful mediocrity like Macmaster to win a knighthood), the novel also makes it clear that what sets Tietjens apart—and makes him at times, for all his intelligence and nobility, seem maddeningly foolish and naïve—is that he actually takes the code seriously, and tries, in his sober, literal-minded way, to live according

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to its precepts. The title *Some Do Not . . .* points to these qualities of character: when Tietjens exerts himself to save a carriage horse after an accident, the driver says he'd never do that "for no beast . . . Some do and some . . . do not"; likewise, when war comes and Tietjens, after being gravely wounded, tells a superior officer that he wants to be sent back to the front lines, the officer replies: "Some do. Some do not." As if to suggest, moreover, that the smart and upright Valentine, despite her scorn for Tietjens's Toryism (she calls him "a regular Admirable Crichton"), is a woman after his own heart, an old man on the street, spying her, says: "That's women! . . . Some do! . . . Some do not!"

One might call Tietjens a good soldier, and there are indeed a number of parallels between *Some Do Not . . .* and Ford's earlier novel. Here, as in *The Good Soldier*, Ford emphasizes the distance that exists between even close friends: though they have been mates for years, Macmaster knows "next to nothing" of Tietjens's feelings. (Sylvia's position on the subject, meanwhile, is that "To know everything about a person is to be bored . . . bored . . . bored!") If, like Dowell, Tietjens is a cuckold, like Edward Ashburnham he is an Anglican whose soul is "at bottom . . . perfectly direct, simple, and sentimental," and whose wife is a rather frosty Roman Catholic of "good stock." Yet there are ways in which Tietjens, unlike Edward, is less a modern Englishman than a medieval knight: at times, indeed, he seems at once too beleaguered, too saintly, and too good-natured under fire to be easily believed, as if Ford had not drawn him from life but from the list of manly virtues enumerated in Kipling's "If" and from his own robust sense of being underappreciated by those around him. (Certainly the latter, and little else, would seem to explain why so exemplary a man as Tietjens should have such a shallow wife and best friend.) Nor does one believe in Tietjens's love for Sylvia's son, who carries his name but is apparently not really his.

In the remaining novels of the tetralogy, Ford spends more time reading the characters' minds, and does it to rather less productive effect. Since he restricts himself more—centering in *No More Parades* on a wartime encounter between Tietjens and Sylvia in Rouen, and in *A Man Could Stand Up*—on Tietjens and Valentine's 1918 romantic epiphany in London—these books seem less varied than *Some Do Not . . .*, the minuet-like dance of perspectives in the initial volume, with its precise, complex, and beautifully elaborated tensions and its vividly conveyed impression of a broad and populous world, giving way here to successions of long, often slack and ellipsis-crowded passages in which the reader feels immured in a character's mind, sometimes to absorbing and sometimes to claustrophobic effect. Absent is the constant sense of psychological discovery that is such a remarkable feature of *The Good Soldier*. Yet if one finds oneself feeling on occasion that one already knows all there is to know about Tietjens, there is also much here of interest, especially in *No More Parades*, which offers a discerning look at the paradoxical brew of emotions—hate and affection, contempt and adulation—that can exist within a longstanding marriage, and at the mysteries that can persist in such a relationship even after years of the utmost intimacy; a particular merit of this novel is that in its pages Sylvia grows into a rounder and richer character, capable of passion, loyalty, even love, a woman both poignant and utterly credible in her contradictions. The third and fourth books of the tetralogy represent a bit of a falling-off: *A Man Could Stand Up*—suffers from the relative dullness of Valentine as a character, and *The Last Post* (which is set in a country cottage during a few hours in the late Twenties, and relates what became of Tietjens's marriage and his romance with Valentine) from a feeling that Ford is tying up loose ends with one hand and beating a dead horse with the other. Yet *Parade's End* as a whole is a marvelous achievement, a penetrating depiction of Tietjens's gradual adjustment—though not his capitulation—to the moral climate of the world he lives in. To read it is to take note of qualities that are rare in the flat, minimalistic fictions of our time: a fascination with the workings of the

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human mind, an intense awareness of the intricacy and mystery of human relations, and a passionate sense of the importance of moral character.

Alan Judd's biography of Ford is written in a chummy plain style that recalls one of Ford's own books of reminiscence. Indeed, there are many respects in which one is reminded of those books: now elegant, now glibly offhand ("Ford's failings are well known and have been re-heated and served up many times"), Judd plunges into his material *in medias res*, proffering jaunty generalizations that show how worldly he is ("every Georgian in Paris was a prince in those days") and making a reader feel as if he has joined a circle of friends in mid-story at a smart cosmopolitan cocktail party. Unlike Arthur Mizener, whose view of Ford's life is indicated by the title (*The Saddest Story*) of his bulky 1971 biography, Judd sees Ford's life as a tale of "the rich in spirit." Though he calls Mizener's book "thorough," Judd pointedly reminds us that Ford "hated academic biographies, feeling that they put in everything but what was important," and he doubtless thinks Ford would have liked his book better. He's probably right. He calls Ford's memoirs "a great rich unreliable tapestry which gives an impression of his life that no biographer could hope to equal," and his own book is an impressionistic tapestry which, while presumably more reliable, derives its value not from critical objectivity but from a forthrightly Fordian subjectivity that affords the reader an opportunity to view Ford from a new angle.

Ford was, Judd tells us, a "good club man," "a realist who wants to be an idealist," a "deeply unconventional" man who was also "a respecter of proprieties," a lover of good writing who was "prepared to worship" good writers, a man whom sixteen or seventeen doctors mysteriously diagnosed as suffering from "sexual abnormalities." Judd quotes Allen Tate on Ford's memory: "He said then that he had the entire novel [*The Good Soldier*]—every sentence—in his head before he began to write it in 1913. He had the most prodigious memory I have ever encountered in an man." Judd makes a number of percipient observations about the distinctive attributes of Ford's work and about the gifts and qualities of character that made the best of it possible. He points out, for instance, that Ford prefers not to deal directly with either sex or death, and suggests that Ford's avoidance of action scenes "may be symptomatic of Ford's own horror of 'scenes.'" He relates an anecdote that shows the novelist's sense of character in action: "Towards the end of their affair, Violet Hunt told him she had spent time at her cottage in Selsey with another man. Ford listened and then quietly re-created the conversation Violet had had with her admirer—according to her, almost word for word—on the basis of his knowledge of them both." Judd stresses the war's role in Ford's development, saying that after it "there was no longer any question as to the nature of his existence on earth. He had been through the fire and everything inessential had been burned off." He praises *The Good Soldier* but doesn't say much about it; he notes that *Parade's End* was supposedly inspired by Proust's funeral and draws an interesting parallel between Ford's tetralogy and Proust's masterwork. His main purpose would apparently be to draw attention to novels like *The Rash Act* (1933) and the autobiographical war story *No Enemy* (1929), both of which he considers very underrated, and to Ford's poems (several of which he quotes in their entirety, including the thirteen-page "On Heaven"), but he doesn't make a very convincing case for them. What Judd is best at, really, is the sort of sharp, non-academic observation that would probably have pleased his subject. After quoting a passage from *The Fifth Queen*, for instance, he comments: "If you were an actor you would know from that scene how to play Henry." Above all, Judd's sense of Ford seems right on the money, and his admiration for Ford as both man and writer no less clear-eyed for being fervent. His book is a welcome homage to an artist who deserves a far larger audience than he has.

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The young Old Master: Van Dyck in Washington

by Karen Wilkin

Not long ago, I paid my first visit to the Los Angeles-based Eli Broad Family Foundation collection, which, according to its handsome brochure, aims "to serve as a resource to foster the serious study and public understanding of contemporary art." Begun about a decade ago, the still-growing collection now numbers some three hundred works by more than seventy-five artists; about 20 percent of it is on view at any given time, in a wonderful, most un-California-like building —a former telephone switching station—a block from the ocean in Santa Monica. It can be visited, by appointment, by "museum professionals, students, art writers, scholars and qualified museum groups." (What about artists? you will ask.) The rest of the collection is on long- or short-term loan to museums, universities, and the like, for the foundation was conceived as a "lending library," lessening demands on limited institutional acquisition funds and storage space.

So far, so good. It's not entirely altruistic, of course, since the museum loans confer instant provenance on works in the collection and help to protect high-priced fashionable art from losing its value, but there are worse things in the art world these days. If you're wondering why museum curators wouldn't prefer to bypass the Broad Foundation and select their own shows, they probably would, but private collectors are increasingly reluctant to part with (expensive) work. The problem is that the collection all too accurately reflects the "official," dominant taste of its time. I am trying to avoid the inflammatory word "trendy," but it's hard, given a selection of artists "represented in depth" that includes, among others, Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Anselm Kiefer, David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Ashley Bickerton, Mark Tansey, Philip Taafe, and Terry Winters. You get the idea. (As to what "in depth" means at the Broad Foundation: Jean-Michel Basquiat, thirteen of whose paintings were on view during my visit, doesn't qualify; he is merely one of the "Other Artists Represented in the Collection.")

Since I had spent several days reveling in the Titian and Van Dyck exhibitions at the National Gallery, in Washington, shortly before going to Los Angeles, I found myself wondering what the Broad Foundation collection might have been like if it had been assembled in an earlier era. What would the Broads of Van Dyck's day have acquired had they started buying works by living artists in, say, 1630 instead of 1980? (The date is not arbitrary, but is inspired by the Van Dyck exhibition, which commemorated the 350th anniversary of the artist's death.) It could have been quite a collection. The senior artists of that year would have included Rubens and Hals in the north and Guido Reni in Italy, each in his early fifties. Bernini, Velázquez, Poussin, Claude Lorrain, and Van Dyck himself were in their early thirties, and there was that new young Dutch painter, the twenty-four-year-old Rembrandt. The

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younger set also included such varied talents as Ribera, Georges de la Tour, the brothers Le Nain, Pietro da Cortona, and Jacques Callot. I am not suggesting that Kiefer and company are their twentieth-century equivalents—the academic salon painters of the 1880s offer a more precise parallel—but there are interesting similarities between the careers of some of the hot young painters of today and those of Van Dyck's time. A bald recital of Van Dyck's own history can make him seem strikingly like one of his colleagues of the 1980s: recognized while still in his teens, the darling of aristocratic patrons while in his early twenties, he was avidly collected and soon in possession of the means to become a high liver hobnobbing with the rich, famous, and powerful. Bernini's story is comparable, as is Rubens's a generation earlier. It all sounds amazingly familiar, like a seventeenth-century version of a *Vanity Fair* profile. The difference, of course, lies in what these seventeenth-century artists produced in order to achieve their extraordinary fame and success.

Of all the candidates for this fantasy collection of seventeenth-century masters, Van Dyck is, in many ways, the most elusive, the most problematic. We all have an image of a typical Van Dyck: a glamorous, full-length portrait of a slender, silk-and-lace-clad figure, classical column and drape in the background, alert spaniel at the sitter's feet. Or *is* that a Van Dyck I am visualizing? Is it something later—a Reynolds or maybe a Gainsborough? Why do I keep thinking about Sargent? That's part of the difficulty with Van Dyck. The powerful influence he exerted on generations of later painters, including Sargent, both assured his fame and obscured his real achievement. The portrait type Van Dyck perfected became a standard for centuries after his death and the sheer number of works by other artists, more or less based on this model, has blurred our perception of the archetype. In the same way, Van Dyck's close association with the older, more famous Rubens, who helped to form his art, both guaranteed his place in history and clouded his career, in his own lifetime and afterwards. Julius S. Held, one of the most perceptive and distinguished scholars of Flemish and Dutch art, has described the complicated relationship succinctly. He calls Van Dyck the only one of Rubens's "many pupils and imitators . . . worthy of his genius," but adds: "His whole career appears to have been a race to catch up with Rubens..."

The ambitious, carefully chosen Van Dyck exhibition at the National Gallery,[1] organized by Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., and Susan J. Barnes, with advice from Dr. Held, attempted to address these issues, to separate the master from both his influences and his followers, to define the special character of his work, and to dispel the notion that he was only a painter of flattering commissioned portraits. The show brought together early works, sketches, and religious and mythological paintings, along with a fine selection of portraits, both commissioned and private —the so-called "friendship portraits"—to demonstrate the full range of Van Dyck's individuality and his achievement. The catalogue brings together essays by an impressive group of scholars of the period, informative entries for each work—including Dr. Held's authoritative discussions of the oil sketches —and a wealth of comparative material.

As the catalogue essays make clear, Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641) was quickly recognized in his own day as phenomenally gifted, precocious even by the standards of a time when life-expectancies were short and everyone started on his life's undertaking with dispatch. That precocity made the teenage Van Dyck Rubens's star assistant despite the twenty-two-year difference in their ages; it also prompted the artists' guild to admit him as a master—which meant he could accept commissions in his own

1 "Anthony van Dyck" was on view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., from November 11, 1990, through February 24, 1991. A catalogue, with essays by Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., Susan J. Barnes, Julius S. Held, and others, has been published by Harry N. Abrams/The National Gallery of Art (383 pages, $95; $29.95 paper).

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right—at the age of nineteen. But that same early virtuosity also provoked a later view of Van Dyck as a failed talent, an artist of cosmic ability who never quite lived up to his promise, even taking into account his early death at forty-two. Even such an informed and thoughtful admirer of Van Dyck as Dr. Held, for example, has pointed out that after years of "feverish" activity, in his "race to catch up with Rubens," "when the mantle of the master finally was ready to descend on his shoulders, Van Dyck's health was no longer capable of sustaining the burden." Dr. Held concludes that no matter how good the younger painter was, no matter how considerable his accomplishments, he "may have failed in his life's ambition."

Van Dyck was often perceived, too, as a kind of untutored prodigy, a technical marvel who could produce astounding effects, even mimic the manner of High Art, without having submitted himself to its discipline and its rules. The exhibition and the comprehensive catalogue were intended to redress such an interpretation, by examining Van Dyck's relationship to Rubens, his first mentor, and anatomizing his debt to the older masters, especially Titian, whose work he studied closely (and collected) during his years in Italy and England. All and all, it was an enlightening, informative show that rendered Van Dyck a great service.

Yet questions remain, compounded, if anything, by the very scope of the exhibition and the catalogue. Dates are still open to argument; sequences invite interpretation. The commentaries by Van Dyck's near contemporaries are not always reliable and later opinions are far from uniform. What seems undisputed is that Van Dyck, the son of prosperous merchants, was painting seriously and well by about the age of thirteen, and that after brief, initial studies with a lesser artist, he entered Rubens's Antwerp studio while still in his early teens. The show began with a 1613 head of a man, silver beard and hair played against a gleaming starched ruff, the whole floating against an inky black ground (Musées Royeaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels). The proud young painter inscribed not only the sitter's age, seventy, but his own, fourteen. It's an unremarkable painting, except for that surprising fact, but it already demonstrates Van Dyck's astonishing command of his medium and the apparently effortless facility that made him Rubens's ideal pupil only a few years later, and, within a very short time, a prized assistant, entrusted with major undertakings. As the catalogue points out, Rubens's studio practice was typical of an age when conception was valued almost as highly as execution. In addition to the works executed entirely by the master, the studio produced others, carried out by assistants, after the master's ideas, with final additions by him; usually copies and minor variants were wholly the work of assistants. Collectors sometimes complained that Rubens delivered work that he hadn't "touched" sufficiently himself, but that seems to have been an excuse for not liking a painting, in general, rather than a specific aesthetic judgment.

It's clear that the young Van Dyck learned an enormous amount from the cultivated, sophisticated, immensely successful Rubens. His years with the older painter were both liberal education and art school. Rubens's studio shaped both Van Dyck's approach to painting and his tastes. The internationally acclaimed Rubens served as a model of what Van Dyck wished to become, in every respect. His art was a standard to aim at, his sumptuous way of life something to be desired and imitated, if possible. It's evident that the relationship was not simply that of master and pupil, since Van Dyck continued to work as an assistant even after he had achieved master status with the guild, and an engaging portrait of Isabella Brant, Rubens's first wife (1621, National Gallery, Washington), is an indication of his intimacy with the family. Painted as a farewell gift, before Van Dyck left Antwerp for his first Italian sojourn, the portrait is an acutely observed image of a great lady, splendidly dressed, who holds the viewer with her intelligent, amused expression. The inevitable drape is pulled back to reveal a magnificent Italianate stone gateway—the monument Rubens had

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recently had built as the entrance to the garden of his Antwerp house. It's a restrained but rich picture, as much because of the play of textures as because of its colors. A range of reds, red-golds, and warm flesh tones, set off by velvety blacks and a glimpse of blue sky, compete with allusions to silk, lace, feathers, and jewelry.

But if Rubens represented a model to be emulated, it seems clear that Van Dyck also regarded him as someone to react against. Van Dyck began to declare his individuality early on, despite his immense debt to Rubens and evident sympathy with his approach. The most obvious difference is Van Dyck's willingness to accept portrait commissions. Rubens found them less challenging than the grand mythological and religious groups, the dazzling battle scenes and historical narratives that have determined our image of him. The few portraits Rubens executed are up to his own high standard, but the best tend to be of his family and intimates, not of paying patrons. Almost from the first, however, Van Dyck's commissioned portraits had a special energy and grace, characteristics that no doubt endeared him to his many clients, in Italy, England, and at home, and eventually won him the post of court painter to Charles I.

Van Dyck soon became known and sought after for his portraits, but he still aspired to paint the ambitious subjects that Rubens regularly tackled. He seems to have aggressively pursued commissions for mythological and religious works, perhaps because such multi-figure, narrative themes could tax even his virtuosity, put pressure on his ability to invent. From Rubens, Van Dyck learned how to achieve the ferocious intensity characteristic of the best Counter-Reformation religious art, but there are great differences in approach. The protagonists of Van Dyck's spiritual dramas always seem to be particular people, with particular anatomies and stances, unlike the more idealized, heroic, vigorous types that populate Rubens's canvases. Instead of the moments of high dramatic action so brilliantly portrayed by Rubens, Van Dyck is more likely to choose moments of relative stillness and contemplation. This is not to say that he forgoes movement and agitation. Quite the contrary. But his figures often signal their intense emotional states by hand gestures and facial expressions, rather than by large body movements. Sometimes, Van Dyck goes a little too far and allows theatrical mugging and ham acting to stand for religious fervor, although this is truer of his early religious paintings than of his later ones. For the most part, the latter are less pyrotechnical, less virtuosic. In them, Van Dyck employs fewer figures to tell his story, and scales them up, while color is more unified and modulated by light, so that the whole seems more focused and coherent.

There are exceptions, of course, such as the marvelous (early) *Moses and the Brazen Serpent* of 1620-21 (Museo del Prado, Madrid), where the nerviness of its many figures seems demanded by the event being narrated; there's no gesticulation for the sake of gesticulation. There's no lack of action and reaction, either, nor of highly charged exchanges between the ecstatic, transported serpent-worshippers and the concerned men and women who try to help them, but it's all ordered, rationalized by overriding rhythms. Billows of drapery, chains of limbs literally unite the complex composition, while a flourish of hands—upreaching, lifted, praying, dangling—cascades through space, at once like a demonstration of how to paint hands and how to imbue them with meaning.

By contrast, the 1628 altarpiece *St. Augustine in Ecstasy* (Kunsthistorische Musea, City of Antwerp) comes perilously close to crossing the border between mysticism and silliness. There are an awful lot of rolling eyeballs in the picture, enough to suggest parody rather than religious exaltation. Then too, Van Dyck's physical means are so transparent that there is no *apparent* abstract order to hold everything in check, distance the peculiar events within the canvas and engage our attention at another level. A vigorous, if less than perfectly preserved sketch for the painting (Private Collection, the Hague), also included in the exhibition, was far more

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compelling and moving, at least to this set of twentieth-century eyes, perhaps because its means were more evident, or because it was less highly finished. When, as in the large version of *St. Augustine*, too much goes on, when too many eloquent gestures are frozen in mid-motion, Van Dyck's paintings can fail to convince; they "protest too much." But in works like *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*, the orchestration of gestures and gazes transcends mere paint to become a visible metaphor for intangible feeling.

The depiction of looks exchanged, of gazes focused on seen or unseen objects, is a significant part of Van Dyck's vocabulary of dramatic elements. The rapturous, upturned gaze that he frequently uses as an emblem of religious ecstasy can get a little tiresome, but in many paintings, the exchange of fixed, intense looks becomes *the* pivotal element of composition. In the stunning *Rinaldo and Armida* (1629, the Baltimore Museum of Art), Armida gazes passionately at the sleeping Rinaldo, in a powerful image of an episode from Torquato Tasso's epic poem *Gerusalemma Liberata*. Sent to murder the crusader Rinaldo, the sorceress Armida was herself so enthralled by the *sight* of the Christian knight that her resolve to kill him was transformed into love and devotion. (Later in the poem, she even converts to Christianity.) Van Dyck makes the act of seeing the actual subject of the painting. Everything, literally, revolves around Armida's scrutiny of Rinaldo's sleeping, unguarded face; Armida's arms, the drapery, the Titianesque attendant figures all serve to frame the two central heads, Rinaldo's warm and shadowed, Armida's pale and glowing; a patch of blue sky further sets off these lush flesh tones and further directs our attention to Armida's concentrated gaze.

In *The Vision of St. Anthony*, painted the same year (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan), something similar, but even more tightly focused, occurs. The Christ child and the saint hold one another's gaze, eyes locked together across a space so narrow that the child reaches out and touches the saint's face. The exchange is so loaded that it seems as though Van Dyck were illustrating John Donne's unforgettable words:

> Our eye-beams twisted, and did thred
> Our eyes, upon one double string . . .

Everything else in the picture, including the Virgin, who looks down on the fraught encounter between the child on her lap and the kneeling saint, simply serves to bracket those two enraptured faces.

These paintings, like most of Van Dyck's best works, including his best portraits, are notable for their unity and clarity and for their sumptuous color—for their Venetianness, in short. It seems clear that his discovery and study of the Venetians, of Veronese and especially of Titian, had as profound an effect on Van Dyck's work as his years with Rubens. The overlap of the Titian and Van Dyck exhibitions at the National Gallery was largely fortuitous, but couldn't have been more opportune. It afforded fascinating comparisons and helped to clarify Van Dyck's debt to the Venetian giant. Unfortunately, the juxtaposition also helped to emphasize Van Dyck's shortcomings, the vast differences between him and his chosen master.

Often, the closer Van Dyck got to Titian and the Venetians, the better he was: witness *Rinaldo and Armida*, or the pastoral idyll *Amaryllis and Mirtillo* (1631-32, Graf von Schönborn, Pommersfelden), an image from a late-sixteenth-century Arcadian epic, filtered through Titian's glorious romp of nymphs and shepherds, *The Andrians* (*c.* 1523-25, Museo del Prado, Madrid). (Van Dyck's Italian sketchbook of 1622-25, now in the British Museum, contains a drawing of the Titian, so the connection is well documented.) His color improved after he began to look attentively at Venetian painting, and his compositions became more economical and monumental. He plucked suggestions for representing the noble and the powerful from Titian's portraits, adapting gestures, postures, props, and angles of the head to the slender, languorous ideal of his own day;

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landscape imagery and lush skies came from Titian's backgrounds.

These homages to the Venetian masters are not simply imitations of a manner Van Dyck admired. They are new inventions that take into account the legacy of the past. His portraits of the court of Charles I, for which Titianesque precedents can easily be found, do not remind us of earlier work as much as they define our notion of Charles's age and its ideals. In the same way, Van Dyck's earlier portraits of the Genoese aristocracy define our image of that city's privileged in the seventeenth century, rather than make us compare them, perhaps unfavorably, with their predecessors in La Serenissima. The best of these are arresting paintings in their own right. The magnificent portrait of Marchesa Elena Grimaldi (1623, National Gallery of Art, Washington), with the opaque black wedge of the marchesa's robe, the staccato curve of her buttons, and the floating reds of cuffs and parasol, is one of the most unforgettable images in seventeenth-century painting. The tall figure, made even more imposing by the small, tenderly painted black boy who carefully holds the parasol, strides across a terrace and transfixes the viewer with a sidelong glance. The portrait of the Marchesa Grimaldi is about as good as a Van Dyck portrait gets. (There are exceptions, but, for the most part, the "official" English court paintings tend to be more interesting for their influence on British painting of the following century than for themselves.) Yet good as he was, in the end Van Dyck never achieved the potency of sheer *painting* that Titian's work embodies; the proximity of the two exhibitions made that evident.

The catalogue essays make much of the difference between Van Dyck's touch and Rubens's, early on, asserting that Van Dyck's "slashing brushstrokes" were markedly unlike Rubens's smoother surfaces. In some works, this seems true, although, as the catalogue also points out, Van Dyck was capable of changing styles and methods when his subject demanded it. No matter how free his stroke, however, it is always subservient to illusion. Throughout his career, Van Dyck's virtuosity allowed him to dissemble his medium, to transubstantiate pigment into flesh or brocade or satin or curling hair, but he never seems to have been interested in charging his materials with emotion, as Titian, especially late Titian, inevitably did, making the placement of pigment a means of sharing profound feelings, by apparently willing paint to resonate with meaning. In Titian's astounding, terrifying *Marsyas* (Kromeriz, Statni Zamek), for example, that dazzling late painting of the flaying alive of the satyr who dared to challenge Apollo to a musical contest, all the drama, all the anguish of the tortured figure hung upside-down in the center of the canvas, comes not from depicted gesture or action, but from the artist's urgent touch, from flickering light. There is no protest, no agitation among the figures, only acceptance, resignation, and, from the hapless satyr, a terrible stillness. As a result, the ghastly scene becomes a kind of surrogate crucifixion, but the real emotional charge comes not from subject, but from paint and touch, from chalky strokes that pull away from one another, at the same time that they fuse to create an overwhelming image. By comparison, Van Dyck's fluttering hands and ecstatic expressions seem a little beside the point.

Titian, like Rubens, calls attention to himself, to his having disposed particular amounts of pigment in particular places. His will, his personality somehow become manifest. Van Dyck is more self-effacing. There's simply nothing he couldn't do with paint, and seemingly without effort. Effects of light, the textures of flesh, fabric, armor, fur, the gleam of jewelry—he could do it all —aristocrats, children, his friends, saints, cherubs, goddesses, dogs, flowers, each presented in its most telling, convincing aspect. Complex poses held no terror for him, except for some crunched foreshortenings, early on. But despite all this, Van Dyck was never a bravura painter the way Hals, for example, was, never a dispenser of dazzling licks of color and light, like Rubens, never a dramatist of stroke, like Titian. In com-

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parison, Van Dyck can seem adept, but a little anonymous.

In the work of his exact contemporary, Velázquez—who, born the same year as Van Dyck, outlived him by almost twenty years—there's a similar absence of technical "problems," a curious kind of stylelessness, almost artlessness. But, at the same time, we're intensely aware of the hand and the intelligence that moved that paint around, decided on that particular shape, set that rigid wall of spears behind those two generals, bowing so politely to one another. Van Dyck, oddly, seems to disappear in his own staggering ability. (Even the famous self-portraits, done in the early 1620s, such as the ones in the Metropolitan Museum and the Hermitage, with their dandy's poses, elegant silk suits, and curling hair, seem to point forward to Gainsborough's portraits of quite other young men more than they fix an image of Van Dyck, as an individual, in our minds.) Perhaps if he'd lived longer, if certain unrealized major projects or destroyed works had survived, we'd have a different impression. Impossible to say, of course. All I know is that when I see a Van Dyck portrait of Charles I, I think about Charles I, but when I see a Velázquez portrait of Philip IV, I think about Velázquez. I'm grateful to the National Gallery for bringing Van Dyck into focus, but in spite of all their efforts, in many ways he remains as elusive as ever. That may be part of the fascination.

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Four poems
by Elizabeth Spires

The awakening

Trying the door,
I bend to enter the playhouse,
too large for the room, the chair,
the rising moon squared in the pane
of the tiny window. The table's set.
My face in the teaplate swims,
like a face set loose from its moorings.
Tonight a crumb will be my portion,
a drop of tea my bitter draught.

Where is she now, the child
who made this house her own dominion?
How easily she has closed the door
on the props of ritual afternoons,
the dolls' lessons and scoldings,
to enter an enchantment of man and beast,
to be the mistress of an immensity
of chilly halls and chambers,
of winding stairs and leaded windows,
each gilded plate, each goblet, held
in her unsure hand, heavy with weight.

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She has entered a grave
unchanging kingdom where the restless cries
and footfalls of imagined companions
will not be heard except as whispers
echoing lightly through vast marble rooms,
like drafts from an open window.

Shall I forget this night, this dream?
Forget the wink and tear of the doll
crying at a shard of moonlight in her eye?
Forget the drop of tea that lies
like a stain at the bottom of the teacup?
I wake to the grieving moon-mouth
falling forever over the dark horizon,
wake to the whippoorwill calling her name,
mine, outside the cold casement.
But I have forgotten all in the time
it takes to blink an eye shut, then open.

Again the whippoorwill calls.
And again it does.
But the child is gone.
The house stands empty.

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The summer of Celia

Is this a dream? The August sun,
the trees in the moment before their decline,

the high bodiless clouds skimming the horizon,
the water a second skin my strokes

slough off, and Celia swimming
her small strokes inside me as I swim?

Celia, the first and only one,
who fits like a seed in my sleeping palm,

who comes unspeaking to me in dreams,
her eyes half blue, half brown.

I cannot remember my own time, floating
in the warm birth sac, my mother asleep,

the waters still, the two of us
dreaming. What, what did we dream of?

Speak to me, Celia. Speak. Speak.
Before birth erases memory and suddenly

you are taken from me, then given back,
wrapped in the white gown of forgetting,

changed, utterly changed. As I will be.
This is our summer, the summer of the dream

we will, too soon, awaken from,
shocked and surprised, in our separate bodies.

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The unfeminine flower

Formally, shall she begin,
greeting her days with ceremony,
bowing to the sun and to the wind.
The air shall be a mirror
she shall not look in, her petals
peaked and stiff as a nun's cowl.
She shall avert her face to the bee's buzz.
Spiked, her stem shall pierce
the Gardener's thick glove.
In consequence, she shall be passed over.
She shall lose the first flush.

Around her, the rank sweet odor
of the garden in midsummer.
And she, untouched.
Parched, she shall not drink,
shall not confess her need. Nor,
knowing her flaw, shall she ask for mercy.
As summer ends, so finally shall she.
Then shall a simple song be sung
by the low and the high choir,
by cricket and fieldmouse and owl,
whose words, if it had words, would be,
She is gone, the proud solitary one . . .
She: the unfeminine flower.

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Good Friday. Driving westward.

. . . being by others hurried every day,
Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:
Pleasure or businesse, so our Soules admit
For their first mover, and are whirld by it.
—John Donne

The rain. Rain that will not end.
The daily errands. Daily bread.
No letting up. No pause
as I steer blindly, circling
the great city. City of tears and blood.
I woke this morning to the ringing phone.
To the last days of the twentieth century.
Hello. Hello. But the line was dead.
The phone in my hand heavy.
My mind whirling. Numb. Taken
against my will closer to oblivion.
At the mall, a man in rags begging
for a coin. My God, only a coin!
I turned my back. Turned back.
But he was gone. Daily, I turn my back.
The suffering of others more and more
like television. Do I drive East? West?
Do I suffer? Shall anger be divine?
Uncorrected, I steer. Swerve
on a slick patch. Lose control.
The rain letting up now. Clouds torn.
The setting sun a brilliant bloody globe.
As if a nailed hand had violently
raked the sky. And then withdrawn.
Past anger or mercy. Leaving me
more distanced. Alone. Driving
this endless road with all the others.
Night and night's Eternity coming on.

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Music

Finding Cortot's place

by Samuel Lipman

I don't play accurately—anyone can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.
—Algernon, in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*

By common consent, the French pianist Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) was one of the greatest musical performers of the century. One of the most recorded pianists of the pre-LP era, he left behind him an extensive phonographic documentation that included most of the works of Chopin, almost all the important keyboard works of Schumann, and some of the classics of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century French composition as well. He was a brilliant chamber musician, forming a trio as early as 1905 with the violinist Jacques Thibaud and the cellist Pablo Casals; their recordings remain classics. He wrote important books about Chopin and about French piano music. He also published working editions, replete with technical suggestions, of Chopin, and taught many important pianists who came to notice after World War II. He was an important conductor, working first as an assistant in Bayreuth at the turn of the century to Felix Mottl and Hans Richter, both of them close associates of the composer, and then playing a significant role in introducing Wagner's late operas to France.

And yet it can hardly be denied that Cortot's wider reputation has been under a cloud for the past fifty years. The reason is not hard to find. He was a willing and assiduous participant in the Vichy regime that administered France during the Nazi occupation, and he had close contacts with the German government and its representatives in Paris; moreover, in 1942 he made a widely publicized concert tour in Germany, including an appearance in Berlin with the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler.

At the close of the war, he was driven out of French concert life, and a 1946 concert at the Théatre des Champs Elysées, which he hoped would mark his return, was ruined through a musicians' boycott and fistfights in the audience. He was never to be welcome again in France, though he did appear in 1958 with the staunchly anti-Nazi Casals at the cellist's festival in Prades.

As the pianist's 1962 obituary in *The New York Times* pointed out, Cortot had hardly been a Hitler supporter prior to the war. In 1933, he made common cause with Thibaud, the violinist Bronislaw Hubermann, and the pianist Josef Hoffmann, in refusing to play in Germany because of the anti-Semitism being whipped up by Hitler; as late as 1939, Cortot refused to play in Italy for the same reason. But he did accept minor posts in Vichy, mostly dealing with the structure of French musical life. There seems to be no record of Cortot's making public praise of Hitler and Nazism. In his defense, it is known that Cortot was successful in getting French Jewish musicians released from captivity; some years

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ago, I remember hearing from French refugees that Cortot had been helpful in making it possible for Jewish musicians to leave at the time of the French capitulation in 1940.

It is often said that Cortot was predisposed, not toward Hitler, but toward German culture; after all, he had made his artistic career by becoming one of the greatest exponents of nineteenth-century German romantic music. Of course, the same can be said of many great French musicians who chose to leave France rather than collaborate, including among them the pianist Robert Casadesus and the violinist Zino Francescatti, both of them non-Jews. What does seem clear about Cortot's behavior is that he had two motives for his collaboration with Vichy and thus with the Germans: a desire for power, and a long and bitter history of feuding with French musicians' organizations. On balance, Cortot comes out of his wartime activities with little credit and much blame. Whether his guilt is so great as to make objective consideration of his merits as an artist morally objectionable will depend upon whether one chooses to consider the extent, as well as the fact, of political guilt in determining an artist's stature.

Notwithstanding Cortot's unsavory reputation as a man, almost all of his major 78 RPM recordings were long available on excellent LP transfers, and a good part of them, dating from the years between 1919 and 1949, have now come out on CD. The late-1920s Thibaud-Casals-Cortot recordings of the Beethoven "Archduke" Trio and the Schubert B-flat major Trio have come out on an Angel CD, [1] as have the contemporary Thibaud-Cortot performances of the Franck Sonata, the Fauré Sonata no. 1, and the Debussy Sonata. [2] Pearl has released a CD of Cortot's Victor solo recordings, containing music by Chopin, Weber, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Saint-Saëns, and Brahms, made between 1919 and 1926; [3] Pearl has also released a second CD, containing mostly pre-1930 solo recordings of Liszt. [4] Music & Arts has released two Cortot CDs. The first is devoted to the pianist's recordings, made in 1926 and 1929, of the Chopin Twenty-four Preludes and the Four Ballades. [5] The second CD contains music by Saint-Saëns, Scriabin, Albeniz, Liszt, and Chopin; [6] this latter disc, though mostly confined to recordings made between 1919 and 1935, does contain several unreleased Chopin performances recorded in 1947. EMI, in its Reference series, has released a CD of Cortot's 1933 and 1934 Chopin recordings, including the Barcarolle, the Twenty-four Preludes, the Four Impromptus, and his 1949 recordings of the Twenty-fifth Prelude and the *Berceuse*. [7] In addition, Pearl has released a Casals CD containing his 1929 recording of the Brahms Double Concerto with Thibaud, conducted by Cortot. [8]

As one listens to the Cortot recordings—not just those on the current CDs, but also those as yet unreleased in the new format—two facts jump to the listener's attention. The first, I suppose, would be considered negative: Cortot's playing places small premium indeed on accuracy. Fast passages, though sometimes brilliantly played, are often flubbed; large chords are frequently smudged, with extraneous notes flying all over the place; tempos are often crazily fast and almost heedless; the piano's sustaining pedal is often employed by Cortot, it seems, for what can only be termed defensive purposes. In all this Cortot presents the greatest possible contrast to today's regnant pianistic style; new recordings—even when made by pianists of quite meager technical accomplishments—are squeaky-clean, one can only guess more by the grace of splicing procedures than of digital mastery. But even live performances (as opposed to studio recordings) are cleaner today than they used to be:

1 Angel CDH-61024
2 Angel CDH-63032
3 Pearl GEMM-9386
4 Pearl GEMM-9396
5 Music & Arts CD-317
6 Music & Arts CD-615
7 EMI CDH-61050
8 Pearl GEMM CD-9363

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in this sense, if only in this sense, it can be said that music performance is better now than in the past.

The second fact to be immediately noticed in these Cortot recordings is just how magnificently he makes the large-scale melodies he plays audible to the listener. The music Cortot specialized in was mostly written in the ninety or so years before World War I. As such it is not a contrapuntal music—a music of several lines co-existing separately, if not independently, in the same sound space. The compositions Cortot played rather were marked by melodies of great intrinsic interest appearing one at a time and accompanied by harmonies and rhythm, each in itself interesting and decorative but possessing no melodic character of its own.

In Cortot's playing it was melody first, last, and always. I should add that his achievement is not simply a matter of playing the melodies loudly and even aggressively—though Cortot certainly did that. It is more a question of phrasing and timing, all calculated to make the melody clear. In this he is quite different from today's breed of pianists, who are so punctilious about playing every note, important and unimportant alike, so distinctly that the listener hears only an ultimately meaningless impasto of sound.

In this regard, the chief discovery of these new CDs is Cortot's 1929 recording of the Liszt Sonata on the second of the Pearl discs mentioned above. The standard recording of this marvelous work has long been Vladimir Horowitz's 1932 version; it is a brilliant assemblage of the virtuoso elements of octaves, chords, and scales out of which this work is so ostentatiously made. The problem with highlighting Liszt's bag of pianistic tricks is that the music easily becomes a virtuoso display often verging, in its excess, on camp; it must be said that even the great Horowitz was not always innocent of striving to make such an effect in his Liszt playing. But the Liszt Sonata is something more than virtuosity: it is also an effusion of melody projected through the silver tone quality of the piano. It is Cortot's triumph to make melodic sense of all the myriad notes the composer has written; in so doing he proves the Sonata to be one of the most musically significant pieces ever written for the piano.

It is not just the music of Liszt that benefits from Cortot's preoccupation with melody as the *raison d'être* of great piano playing. In his Chopin, Cortot treats all the thrice-familiar melodies not as the sickly sweet and ultimately trivial effusions they are so often made to seem today, but as heroic *proclamations.* Cortot's forward playing of all these melodies can only be likened to that of the other great Chopinist of the inter-war period, Arthur Rubinstein. It is just this—how one hesitates to use the word today—manly quality that makes Cortot's Chopin so compelling. Here is Chopin the conqueror, the composer who could write the famous "Revolutionary" Etude, and who could say when he heard the proud melody that opens his Etude no. 3 in E major, *O ma patrie*—"O my fatherland." If there are any lingering thoughts in this cynical age that Chopin was no more than a salon composer, listening to Cortot's playing on these CDs of the Preludes, the Ballades, and the Impromptus amply demonstrates that the only thing wrong today with Chopin is the way he is played.

In chamber music, Cortot could hardly be so spectacular. By its very nature, chamber music tends to inwardness and collegiality. The most important melodic passages are only infrequently given to the piano in a solo capacity; in the greatest chamber music—if I may teasingly borrow a phrase from Marxism—the piano is more base than superstructure. What is so remarkable about Cortot's playing on these new CDs is just how different his piano tone, so gleaming and powerful in the solo pieces, becomes in chamber music. He manages a wonderful blend of solidity and suavity—the iron hand, one is tempted to say, in the velvet glove. Nowhere is this quality more remarkable than in the Beethoven "Archduke" Trio, in which the playing of Thibaud, Casals, and Cortot combines without any of the superstar rivalry so often present in the often brilliant chamber-music recordings of the trio made up of Jas-

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cha Heifetz, Gregor Piatigorsky, and Rubinstein. The same kind of teamwork marks the Thibaud-Casals recording of the Brahms Double Concerto, in which Cortot conducted the Barcelona orchestra that Casals had earlier founded; here the slow movement, with its sublimely in-tune octaves between the violin and the cello, receives as beautiful a performance as one can imagine.

Not surprisingly, Cortot's playing of French chamber music with Thibaud was marvelous too. The recording of the Franck Sonata on the new Angel CD could hardly be bettered, not just because of the high quality of the playing, but because of the seriousness with which both artists approach this music that, like Chopin, can seem so over-sweet in less noble hands. In general, Cortot's playing of French music was remarkable for its restraint, achieved without any diminution in the power of the music. The Debussy Sonata recording with Thibaud on the Angel CD is haunting; one looks forward to the availability on CD of Cortot's unequaled recordings, made in the decade before World War II, of Franck's Symphonic Variations, Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue, and Prelude, Aria and Finale.[9] The same can be said for Cortot's recordings of the very beautiful Saint-Saëns Concerto no. 4 in C minor, and of the Ravel Concerto for the Left Hand.[10]

But one omission in the current CD availability of Cortot's playing deserves to be underscored. I refer to his many Schumann recordings, including the Piano Concerto.[11] These are touching, imaginative, always powerful but sometimes wistful performances, in which Cortot's tone is marked not just by strength and what I have earlier called a gleaming quality, but also by richness and weight. Here too, as in all his playing, the pacing of the melodies is straightforward and direct, with none of the cautious and would-be-musical pauses so frequent in today's piano playing. His hugely sensitive 1928 recording of the *Carnaval* has only one competitor—Rachmaninoff's recording, curiously enough made just the next year.[12] Not surprisingly the two performances are quite different: Rachmaninoff's is titanic, motoric, and overwhelmingly brilliant; Cortot's is more pensive and even (in contrast to his Chopin playing) feminine. Both recordings, I hardly need add, are among the treasures of the phonograph.

Just because it seems so surprising, one further Cortot recording deserves mention. About 1932 Cortot recorded all the Bach Brandenburg Concertos with the chamber orchestra of the Ecole normale de musique, a school which he had started in Paris in 1919. I have heard two of the concerto recordings, no. 3 and no. 5.[13] Of all the Brandenburg Concertos, no. 5, with its marvelous and extended keyboard cadenza in the first movement, is by far the best known. Cortot's performance of the cadenza is extraordinary in its force and brilliance. This is Bach playing of the highest caliber, thoroughly fresh-sounding in its celerity and directness; the performance is further distinguished by Thibaud's songful playing in the slow movement. Perhaps there is one extra-musical reason—though such is hardly needed—that this recording should be reissued: to prove what only the young do not seem to know—that Bach was indeed played, and played marvelously, before the recent arrival of the authentic performance movement.

I want to return now to the epigraph with which I began. Wilde's words are usually taken to be no more than bright and brittle jokes, set in a bright and brittle play; at most they are seen as nothing more than a mocking statement of the aesthete's credo of the

9 These performances were available on an EMI (France) LP, 2902671.

10 The Saint-Saëns and Ravel concertos have recently been available on an EMI (France) LP, 2C 051-43370.

11 All the pianist's Schumann recordings were available some years ago in an EMI (England) set, World Records SHB 70.

12 Rachmaninoff's *Carnaval* is now available on CD as Fidelio 8822.

13 I would like to thank my friend Dean Morse and the Cortot pupil Robert G. Lurie for making these recordings, on tape, available to me.

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superiority of feeling to fact, of emotion to reason, and, especially, of art to science. But however mocking Wilde was—not least of his own sentiments—it cannot be denied that his words bear with particular force on music performance. A performer spends a lifetime getting the ascertainable data—the notes—of the music he plays right. Within the idea of "right" are inevitably contained the notions of accuracy and replicability. To do it right, and to be able to do it right every time, is the goal of every music student; in our time, it has become the goal of every musical performer. In the hands of such great performers as the conductors Arturo Toscanini and Pierre Monteux, the quest for accuracy produced performances of undisputed interest and communicativeness; in the hands of others, and especially in the hands of today's performers, the goal of accuracy has produced a deadening caution and uniformity. Just how much the same everything sounds today is tellingly illustrated by the practice in the current wave of television broadcasts of music contests, in which the performances by several musicians of a single piece are seamlessly spliced one into the other.

I don't know how much Cortot worked at the piano. I suspect not very much, though it cannot be denied that he was vastly interested—as his editions of Chopin show—in the down-to-earth details of how one learns difficult technical passages. In any case, what must be true is that he practiced to be able to play something the way he wanted to, not to *guarantee* that the result would be note-perfect. What emerges from Cortot's playing is his soaring musical spirit, his striving to give wings to the music. It is this artistic striving that will make us remember Cortot as a musician, even while we remember, and reject, the self-seeking shabbiness of his wartime behavior as a man.

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Art

The neo-Baroque: Lipchitz and de Chirico

by Jed Perl

Ovals, spirals, opulent materials, heroic gestures: what does the modern spirit know of these essential elements of Baroque art? Inveterate individualists, we cannot see pomp and grandeur as a way of life; and the idea that human experience should be framed publicly, as it often is in Baroque art, does not match up with our sense that each of us is locked inside his or her own head. The Baroque works today mostly as a romantic metaphor, as a dream in which our private grandiosity bursts out and takes over the entire world. Some would say this can never be a modern metaphor. And one may wonder if the later, neo-Baroque work of Jacques Lipchitz and Giorgio de Chirico ought to be called modernist, anti-modernist, or modernism having a bad dream about itself. These are questions that Baroque forms inevitably raise when they appear in a modern context. What is missing, in the current climate, are considered answers. In December, when Borghi & Company on East Eightieth Street mounted a large, interesting show of the later work of de Chirico, I was distressed to hear people observe affinities between de Chirico's heavily worked, tragi-comic canvases and the polychrome statuary of Jeff Koons. Are all neo-Baroques equal? I think not. Meanwhile, in the catalogue of the Lipchitz retrospective that's now at the Jewish Museum,[1] Alan G. Wilkinson, the curator, presents a case for the late, neo-Baroque Lipchitz that involves an artificial distinction between form and feeling. Wilkinson—who organized the show for the Art Gallery of Ontario—observes of Lipchitz's later work that the "purely formal concerns with the syntax of Cubism were superseded by a renewed interest in subject matter as a means of expressing personal emotions and feelings." But don't the neoclassical harlequins and still lifes of the 1920s constitute an expression of personal emotions and feelings? And isn't the neo-Baroque a formal matter, along with whatever else it may be? Lipchitz and de Chirico, very different artists with very different attitudes toward the Baroque, might have felt some sympathy for our own morning-after-modernism sensibilities.

Jacques Lipchitz was born in Lithuania in 1891, the first child of a prosperous Jewish couple. Wilkinson describes the upbringing as "liberal Jewish." Lipchitz's father, "a successful building contractor and a member of a wealthy Jewish banking family," didn't want him to study art. But his mother gave

1 "Jacques Lipchitz: A Life in Sculpture" is currently on view at the Jewish Museum, New York City (January 16-April 14, 1991). It was previously exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (December 15, 1989-March 11, 1990), the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba (May 13-August 12, 1990), and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri (October 7-November 25, 1990). A catalogue, by the show's curator, Alan G. Wilkinson, has been published by the Art Gallery of Ontario (196 pages, $30 paper).

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him the money to go to Paris, and he arrived there in 1909. By the time he was taken by Diego Rivera to Picasso's studio, "probably in the spring of 1914," Cubism was an accomplished fact.

The first full gallery of the show, devoted to work that spans the late 1910s well into the 1920s, is very beautiful; on this all the critics seem to agree. This room makes it abundantly clear that Lipchitz is a natural sculptor. He glories in the substances—and substantialness—of the world. When he uses stone or metal he's saying, "Look at these beautiful things of the world." He's in touch with the imagination-filling mimesis by which the block of stone becomes the figure or the flower. He returns us to the process by which dust is transformed into life, a process that is at the heart of the creation myths of many cultures. And even if we feel that the forms in this first room—the harlequins and bowls of fruit and musical instruments—are conventional forms treated in a Cubist manner we already know from Picasso and Gris; even if we feel this, we're carried along by the pleasure of being in the company of an artist for whom sculpture is the multi-dimensional experience that it should be but so rarely is. Lipchitz makes us want to walk around the sculptures and touch them, too. He's bringing us to levels of experience that painting can't approach.

In this room, Lipchitz is a powerful stone carver. *Seated Man* (1922), in dark Brittany granite, with its hoodlike head and circle-eyes, is all smooth, tight surfaces. The turnings from plane to plane are razor-sharp, elegantly decisive. *Musical Instruments* (1923), one of those Synthetic Cubist homages to the most formal of Chardin's still lifes, is in a softer stone. This lovely bas-relief feels more approachable: the stone is warmer, more casually worked. Meanwhile, the surfaces of the bronzes (this was to be Lipchitz's primary medium from the 1930s on) are lively and mobile. The impress of the artist's fingers, working the plaster or clay or wax, carries over into the finished bronze. In that first room, Lipchitz summarizes the form sense of a certain period—the period when Synthetic Cubism began to wonder if it wasn't really neoclassicism. And some of those beautiful demonstrations of Synthetic Cubist style are transformed, through the artist's instinct for the three-dimensional, into great works of art.

After this remarkable early period, as the Lipchitz show moves toward the 1930s, the work goes into a slump. Thinking about the later rooms of the show, I find it difficult to summon up specific pieces: what holds in the mind is a general impression of ferocious, weighty, upward-gesturing forms. The gently lyrical mood of the early work has evaporated. Not everything is as gauche as *The Cry* (*The Couple*), which is just inside the second big gallery; but the problems that Lipchitz is having in this 1928-29 piece, his inability to find a form sense appropriate to his growing enthusiasm for energetic, extrovert emotions, is never entirely resolved in the succeeding years. While the subject here, a copulating couple, has a frankness that one may think of as modern, the undulating forms bring us back to the space-devouring arabesques of Baroque art. It seems that after the clowns and still lifes of the 1920s, with their reminiscences of Watteau and Chardin, Lipchitz felt a need to take up *Jacob and the Angel* and the *Rape of Europa*, with their reminiscences of Delacroix and Titian. In *The Cry* the surfaces are still rather smooth. But in the next few years, Lipchitz begins to animate the surfaces, to give them a rough and uneven character that is probably meant to echo the rough and uneven movements of the sculpture as a whole. All too often, however, the surface activity feels like little more than a flurry of random activity—jitters rather than rhythms.

Lipchitz made his first mature statements in a Cubist language that was a sort of shorthand distillation of the language of Western easel painting. This shorthand probably jibed with the aspirations of a secular Jew—it reflected the liberal spirit of Western civilization. But by the late 1920s, Lipchitz may have been looking for a way to express a Jew's sense of the darkening times. Lipchitz came to America during the war, and settled in

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New York. After the war, he became increasingly involved in large public projects. Like many other artists—Léger, Matisse, Chagall, Picasso—he wanted to assist in the rebuilding of the world. Lipchitz's later work, in which he invokes at once biblical and classical texts and the grand rhetorical language of a pre-liberal Europe, could be an attempt to reimagine Baroque art as a modern religious art. (The same could be said of certain aspects of Chagall's later work.) As a Jewish artist who was working as a sculptor—and thus, according to those who take the ban on three-dimensional images as absolute, a maker of idols—Lipchitz was already challenging the limits of what a Jew could do. (Clearly Lipchitz, like Chagall, felt little compunction about using Christian and pagan as well as Jewish themes: like many liberal Jews, they were intent on inventing a United Nations of religion.) And it is one of the paradoxes of his work that as he made his Jewishness more overt—taking up biblical subjects, designing a *Tree of Life* for a site on Mount Scopas, overlooking the Judaean hills—he was posing ever greater challenges to the anti-representational bent of Jewish aesthetics (if Jewish attitudes toward the visual arts can be thought to present a consistent attitude). In any event, Lipchitz's tendency to see biblical stories as allegories of the human condition—he commented of his interest in the story of Jacob wrestling with the Angel that it suggested "that God wants us to fight with him"—can make the sculpture look unsettlingly like church art. This would not have disturbed Lipchitz, who sculpted a Virgin for the church in the French Alps for which Father Couturier had commissioned works from Lurçat, Rouault, Chagall, Matisse, Bonnard, and Léger. But it may be part of what accounts for the emotionally unresolved character of the work. At heart he must have been a secular man, in rebellion against all public avowals of faith and belief. And yet he spent most of the latter part of his life making public art.

To go from Cubism back to the Baroque is in any case a most difficult move, and perhaps it is Lipchitz's hubris that he could not see the extent of the difficulties. Modern art and the monuments of the past: Lipchitz—like another Jew from the East, Chagall, and so many others—wanted it all. And why not? The question was how. When Picasso, a supreme figure draftsman, took up the anatomical complexity of a Baroque style, the stress involved in joining the abstracted language of Cubism to the anatomical complexity of nature could be daunting, could lead to works that are awkward, or ugly in unintentional ways. All the more so for Lipchitz—who lacked an easy, idiomatic grasp of the figure as a complex organism—was it going to be difficult to infuse the work with a Baroque sense of movement, of action-and-reaction. In Lipchitz's later work, passages jar against the whole. The relatively naturalistic treatment of a nose or a leg violates the generally abstracted character of the sculpture. Some of the works of the later decades look good in parts, from a particular angle, at first glance. Lipchitz has difficulty when it comes to joining different manners and modes; he can't get the modern and the Baroque to hold together. Initially, the movements in some of the smaller sketches and maquettes look more complete than the movements in the larger works. But as I went through the show, I began to feel that Lipchitz ultimately comes up against the same problems in both the larger and smaller works. There are strong passages in even the biggest ones—sometimes the hubris, the nerve, is appealing. And sometimes the little maquettes and studies feel crabbed; they're Expressionist and precious at once, a disagreeable combination. Yet when all this has been said, I come back to the sense that the work as a whole has excitement, nerve. Lipchitz is a born sculptor, and even if he doesn't get where he wants to go, he goes.

De Chirico, who was born in 1888 and lived to the age of ninety, is an acknowledged essential figure in modern art—something that Lipchitz once was but no longer is. The Museum of Modern Art devotes almost a whole room in the permanent collection to the Metaphysical paintings that de Chirico

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had been doing just before and during World War I. Yet the work after 1918 is subject to one of the most complete blackouts in the annals of modern art. People who are more sympathetic to School of Paris taste than to School of New York taste have generally been willing to grant that there is some quality in the self-portraits of the late 1910s and 1920s; but the work from the later decades—the still lifes of fruit, the self-portraits, the narrative scenes—have had little currency save among those who are looking for ancestors for postmodern kitsch. From the moment when de Chirico went over to neoclassicism and the Surrealists declared that he had abandoned modernity, he has been the archetypal modern-who-fell-off-the-wagon. De Chirico, who was probably a little mad, and certainly was mad at the orthodox moderns, didn't strengthen his case by producing in his later years hundreds of replicas of his Metaphysical works. But it also seems to me that modern taste has overemphasized the extent to which his rather conventionally and flatly painted Metaphysical cityscapes and still lifes are central to modern art. Of de Chirico it can be said, with implications that depend on one's taste, once a narrative and illustrative painter, always a narrative and illustrative painter.

I think there are remarkable de Chiricos from the Twenties, Thirties, Forties, Fifties, and even from 1960. I went to the show at Borghi & Company and—amidst this gallery's overdone interiors (damask and baize and swags), amidst many insipid and mediocre paintings—I saw an artist with guts, taste, imagination. I think there are still lifes and portraits and figure compositions all through in which one feels de Chirico's superb gifts, his insistence on pushing at the limits of the predictable, on making the conventional feel unconventional. The *Portrait of Alfredo Casella*, from 1924, is a painting of such skill and clarity and imaginative reach, I cannot imagine anybody not admiring it. The gravity of the sitter, the strangeness of a modern man painted as if he were living in the Renaissance: this peculiar juxtaposition is one that we encounter in the work of a number of realists of the Twenties and Thirties. But de Chirico goes beyond antiquarianism. He combines hard linear outlines with scumblings and sensitive feathery brushstrokes to give the painting an unpredictable poetry. The completeness of form that de Chirico insists on here—and in his still lifes and figure compositions—is perhaps seen by many as insipid, antimodern. But I admire the courage to go the whole way with the old forms, to fill them out; and this man is such a gifted painter (and in some respects so much more fluid a painter in the Twenties and Thirties than he was in the Teens) that he is able to expand the limits of the old forms. A still life of a few apples and oranges and a pear, nestled in a white cloth, from 1929, is pearly and luminous—it's an extraordinary thing. A still life from around 1960, with an array of fruit arranged on a stone shelf in front of a landscape, is painted in a heavier manner; it has a rather metallic effect that is quite pleasing, like a seventeenth-century painting in enamel. Here the weightiness of the brushwork gives the bit of drapery that hangs to one side a Surrealist monumentality: it's drapery turning into rock. *The Departure of the Knight Errant*, from 1923, is wistfully atmospheric, Giorgionesque. Even an odd battle scene from the 1940s, which takes off on Romantic book illustrations, gives the nineteenth-century conventions an ironic, acidic edge. And de Chirico is still able to ransack his Metaphysical stockroom with interesting results. *Battle of Gladiators*, from 1927, employs simplified light/dark contrasts to turn rippling muscle into curious abstract pattern. *Trophy with Head of Jupiter*, from 1929-30, is an allegorical junk heap painted in wistful tans and grays. Oh, there were plenty of clinkers in the Borghi show. But I thought that about a third of the work was quite impressive.

De Chirico was an artist with a passion for the Baroque; the Baroque is an Italian's birthright. But he had been born into the industrialized Italy of the late nineteenth century, and so the Baroque was the past—a glorious ruin. From the point of view of Paris—where de Chirico had always been an

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outsider—the Baroque was already assimilated into later styles, becoming the Romanticism of Delacroix, the Postimpressionism of Cézanne. For the School of Paris, the Baroque could be contemplated intellectually, as a counterpoint to Cubism. But for de Chirico, who had never been a Cubist or taken an interest in Cubism, there could be no thought of fitting Baroque rhythms or Baroque forms into a Cubist space. It's the absence of Cubist ideas that makes de Chirico's later paintings look—to viewers who believe that all post-World War I painting must be post-Cubist painting—so shockingly banal. And the failed ones are shockingly banal. But the great interest of the later de Chirico lies in his finding a way to be both modern and Baroque without in any way being Cubist. The sensitivity to the emotional implications of size and scale that informs the Metaphysical period is an important element in the later work, too. What is new in de Chirico's work of the Twenties is the suppressed intensity of the brushwork: it's the intensity of a wild Expressionist modern spirit who's trying to express himself within a very traditional idea of the selfless brushstroke. What I found admirable in the Borghi show was de Chirico's ability to subsume the individuality of his hand to the old subjects and old forms—and then express his individuality through the reinvention of those old forms. De Chirico may be the best demonstration of how a traditional kind of painting, done with vigor and intensity in the present, takes on the character of the present. The later de Chiricos have a heaviness, a density, a sadness that feels like a reflection of his spirit and his times. There's something quixotic about his passion for the old motifs. His quixotic spirit is his modern spirit.

Certainly, the later work of de Chirico and Lipchitz pose challenges to contemporary taste. It is by no means easy to tell the good from the bad in what they've done. The trouble for us just now is that much of what is yeasty, interesting, engaging, has the look, if not the spirit, of kitsch. Some of the work is kitsch; and the postmodern crowd that loves de Chirico because it's kitschy is not entirely wrong. But when an artist of true sensibility falls into false sentiment it's often because he's trying to push the limits of feeling and is pushing them too far, or is pushing the wrong way. The problem for taste just now is how to tell the difference between kitsch and feeling. A true feeling can look dangerously like its kitsch double.

In the catalogue of the Lipchitz show, Alan Wilkinson alludes a couple of times to an essay that Clement Greenberg wrote about Lipchitz. He opens with a quote from Greenberg, in fact, to the effect that "Lipchitz is a great, sometimes very great, sculptor who presents the critic with a peculiarly difficult problem." To Wilkinson, the point is that Greenberg is uncomfortable with the "expressionist violence, tortured subject matter and seemingly overwrought emotionalism," yet I think that when Greenberg says that Lipchitz has the "superlative and inalienable power to knead matter into massive, simple, and energetic form," he's speaking of the emotionalism. I think Wilkinson confuses false feeling in bad Lipchitz with real feeling in good Lipchitz, and thus cannot see that what Greenberg is talking about is the real emotion. The latter part of the Lipchitz retrospective gets kitschy; and of course it's Lipchitz's fault, but it's Wilkinson's, too, because the curator should be able to tell the real feeling, the feeling that's sunk in the form, from the false feeling.

The past decade has seen an upswing in shows, both here and in Europe, devoted to unexplored or misunderstood aspects of twentieth-century art. This is all to the good. But the art historian's rage for completeness—which has filled even the recent shows of Old Masters such as Fragonard and Canaletto and Van Dyck with mediocre work that dragged the artists down—is not compatible with the carefully shaped presentations that many twentieth-century artists need and deserve. Artists like Lipchitz and de Chirico need pruning. In their lifetimes they would have raged against it; but wouldn't even the most egomaniacal artist prefer, in his heart of hearts, a limited representation that left the

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discriminating audience happy to a full representation that left people in a funk? The catalogue of the de Chirico show, which was produced in Italy and is full of clearly written entries that do full justice to the best works in the show, suggests that in Italy there are students of de Chirico who are discriminating. But the Borghi show lacked point and focus, and the same can be said of the Lipchitz show.

We did not need these shows to tell us that emotion is back in favor. But the way these shows are presented and received suggests that we're a long way from knowing how we feel about feeling. These shows, with their heartfelt invocations of the grandeur of the Baroque, remind us that the question of where feeling ends and kitsch begins is not a new one. Wilkinson is so busy explaining that Greenberg is wrong about Lipchitz that he seems to overlook the extraordinary fact that Greenberg, the arch-modernist, really admired these neo-Baroque creations of Lipchitz's. That hunger for the Baroque—for grand gestures—runs all through the century. In 1947, even as Greenberg was blasting late de Chirico, he offered a subtle homage to the Italian, when he wrote that while de Chirico's later work was "Irrelevant as painting inside painting, it is sheer cultural evidence, a kind of funeral oration more affecting than anything that could be put into words." And why would Greenberg not care for the neo-Baroque of Lipchitz and de Chirico? After all, hadn't Pollock himself gone through various neo-Baroque modes in his adaptations of Benton and the Mexican muralists? Like the neoclassical, the neo-Baroque looms larger in our century the closer one looks. There's something authentic in the passion of de Chirico. And there's something to those fiery late Lipchitzes. Sometimes our own kitsch-conscious moment is too smart for its own good. We miss these artists' real quality if we judge them in relation to the kitsch Zeitgeist of the present. After all, we want artists to be able to laugh and weep and cry out.

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Theater

Backstage with Odets

by Donald Lyons

After Clifford Odets's heyday as the voice of the people in the Group Theatre in the Thirties, he went off to Hollywood but returned to the New York stage with three final plays in new, postproletarian modes. *The Big Knife* (1949) was an exposé of Hollywood moguls cruelly manipulating actors and writers under their thumb. Clearly, Odets had a score to settle. In 1950, he wrote *The Country Girl*, a backstage triangle story, and, in 1954, *The Flowering Peach*, a play about Noah that was highly praised by Eric Bentley. (The Fifties were something of an Indian summer of biblical dramatization. Broadway saw not only *The Flowering Peach* but Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.*, a Pulitzer-Prize-winning verse drama of Job. The movies, with equal meretriciousness but more nonchalance and fun, produced extravaganzas like *The Robe*, *Quo Vadis*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *Ben-Hur*. But the specious and solemn hollowness of all this provided, in no very long run, fodder for the cynicism and nihilism waiting to swallow popular culture in the next decade. The Bible became artistically unusable—radioactively contaminated by camp, so to speak—for quite a while.)

But it is *The Country Girl* that concerns me here, for the Roundabout Theatre Company, a respectable revival organization now based in the superb old Tammany Hall building at Seventeenth Street and Park Avenue and celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, has chosen to revive the play on the fortieth anniversary of its premiere. *The Country Girl* is one of those artifacts of quasi-serious culture that everybody knows *something* about but that few could describe coherently (the works of Robert E. Sherwood or Norman Mailer or Kurt Vonnegut or Thomas Pynchon come to mind as sharing this category). Uta Hagen originated the misleadingly named title role of a mousy-seeming-but-really-tough backstage wife; Grace Kelly did the movie and Bing Crosby was her husband, the alcoholic has-been Broadway actor given a last chance by idealistic young director William Holden. Indeed, much of the intermission conversation I overheard was precisely about the old movie casting ("No, no, Bing Crosby was the *husband*").

The awful problem with *The Country Girl* is that the thumbnail character descriptions just given of the three leads pretty much exhaust the whole play. That is it—but at length. Over the objections of a skeptical producer, hotshot director Bernie Dodd casts rummy Frank Elgin in a Broadway-bound play by a promising young playwright. Bernie has seen Laurette Taylor in *The Glass Menagerie* eight times and adduces her as an example of the right role rehabilitating an alcoholic. (This is an odd instance of a playwright mentioning, in a play, one of his own epigones.) Bernie remembers Frank's great days years back (in plays that seem to have been middle O'Neill): "You and Lunt and Walter Huston—you were my

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heroes and I saw everything you did." (Maybe Frank combines, rather improbably, aspects of the dapper Lunt and the gritty Huston.) And sure enough, at an audition Frank throws away the script and catches fire, eliciting the awed comment: "Where was that seedy guy hiding all that power and majesty?" (This is only one of the odd moments when *The Country Girl* seems like a tinny, witless echo of its exact contemporary, the backstage film *All About Eve*.)

But back in the dingy furnished room they rent, Frank's wife, Georgie, disgusted with his backsliding, irresponsibility, and self-deception, is packing a scratched suitcase. She has had it. She also wears a darned cardigan sweater—the very emblem of the play and the one image most people retain of it. But she hangs in there for the duration of rehearsals, battling the director, who has swallowed Frank's lies about *Georgie's* (nonexistent) alcoholism and who thus regards her as a threat to Frank's stability.

From furnished room to dressing room, from New York to a Boston tryout back to opening night in New York, the play plods its grim way for eight long scenes until Bernie sees the light about who the real drunkard is, falls in love with the wife, and is gently rebuffed by her, who cannot desert her dependent husband, above all in his moment of fragile triumph. It is all prodigiously unsurprising, gray, dull, brown, plain, and designedly dour in pace and look. Dourness might, of course, be a legitimate thing to enforce on an audience at, say, *Coriolanus*, but here it seems unearned, a disabling poverty rather than a slimming *askesis* of the imagination. Within these limits of prosaic script and bare production and almost hieratically static direction, the three leading performers in the Roundabout production did well. Paul McCrane, so good as the kid in the park in the first company of *Six Degrees of Separation*, excels here as the dedicated director; he can express decency and conscience and integrity in an easy, nondidactic way. David Rasche played the actor as vigorous and energetic in his pathology; he lent a welcome vigor to self-pity. Karen Allen brought an appealing edge of repressed life to the long-suffering wife. She kept suggesting a richer, more coiled character than the script provided. The first-act curtain line, for instance, is her "One of these days you'll know what I want." But then we never find out. The threatened explosion in the second act never detonates. She just goes meekly back to being weakness's handmaiden. In fact, it takes no therapeutic shrewdness to see that Odets did not know what he was doing dramatically or psychologically in the resolution of his play. He sends the wife back to her role as an "enabling" crutch to a babied husband *and* he plainly regards this as a satisfyingly noble conclusion. There is no hint of the tragic despair with which Henry James has Catherine Sloper, at the end of *Washington Square*, pick up her fancy-work "for life, as it were." Is this to judge Odets anachronistically in the smug light of what we know, or think we know, today about the handling of addictions?

Maybe to an extent, but the criticism remains a fair one since artists *should* know these things. Shaw knew them, in the very play to which *The Country Girl* owes so much. For *The Country Girl*—and I do not recall seeing this pointed out—amounts to a reworking, a resetting, of *Candida*, with the earlier, eponymous heroine, compared by Shaw to Titian's Virgin of the Assumption in a "well-aproned" modern garb, still further downmarket in Odets, borrowing novels from the public library and wearing that cardigan. In *Candida* (which is, to be sure, no masterpiece but a very uneven early work) all sides of the triangle are ferociously articulate. The young poet Marchbanks, who wishes to remove the charming Candida from her parson husband, says to him: "Oh, let us put aside all that cant. It horrifies me when I think of the doses of it she has had to endure in all the weary years during which you have selfishly and blindly sacrificed her to minister to your self-sufficiency . . ." At the end, Candida makes her decision to stay at home in the famous words, "I give myself to the weaker of the two," and she goes on to say,

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"I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him, and stand sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it." These are surely chilling words, not only more articulate than Georgie's (whose final action is virtually unexplained) but far more ambiguous. Eric Bentley calls this finale "savage," saying, "Only Strindberg could have written a sequel to it. . . . Candida has chosen to let her husband discover his shame: she, as well as he, will have to take the consequences. Let the stage manager hold razors and strait jackets in readiness!" Shaw sentences his heroine to a Strindbergian hell; Odets sends his to Sardi's. It is the difference between a realist's clearsightedness and a sentimentalist's coziness.

Actually alcohol is not the only addiction onstage in *The Country Girl.* Characters are continually dosing or sedating themselves with one thing or another. Bernie remarks at one point, "It's the age of Aspirin, they say," and swallows a few. "Why did you marry me?" asks Frank, and Georgie replies, "That's easy; you always had a box of Chiclets in your pocket." (This was my favorite line in the play. The seductive power of old brand names!) But the real drug visible here is tobacco. Bernie constantly smokes. Georgie crisply warns him, "Tobacco is a drug that warps your judgment," and later affectionately adds, "You smoke too much." (Let me repeat that verbal elegance is not Odets's forte.) Much tense puffing onstage; smoke wafting through the audience; flurries of coughing. A while back I had occasion to wonder about the health of actors forced to scamper nude about a draughty stage; here I worried about Mr. McCrane's lungs. But smoking is what the play understands. Odets had a feel for its nervous tics and spasmodic rhythms. He thought the play was about alcohol and theater, while it was really about cigarettes and Chiclets. This is a parable, in miniature, of Odets's unawareness of his own strengths and weaknesses.

While sitting through the longueurs of *The Country Girl*, I tried to make sense of the play within the play, the vehicle that is returning Frank to Broadway stardom and self-respect. One could piece it together a bit from fragments and references and hints. It was the story of a corrupt but lovable Irish political boss-*cum*-judge who is brought to book, arrested, tried, and disgraced (he may find a higher wisdom in his humbling). At home the boss has to contend with his beloved granddaughter's infatuation with a hotheaded young radical. It seemed, in other words, a fairly standard sociopolitical melodrama of the Broadway of the 1930s—very much the sort of thing the Group Theatre felt itself superior to. Not that Odets was primarily interested here in endorsing such vehicles, but he *was* infatuatedly endorsing the star system (equally anathema to the old Group) that needed just such vehicles. I asked myself if I'd rather be watching the play within the play, but decided, like W. C. Fields preferring Philadelphia to death, that, all things considered, I'd rather be at *The Country Girl*, where I was.

The play that won the New York Drama Critics prize in the season of *The Country Girl*'s debut was Sidney Kingsley's dramatization of Arthur Koestler's profound exposé of the psychopathology of Stalinist show-trial prosecutors and victims, *Darkness at Noon.* I skimmed through it, and it seems, if verbose, a moving and still very timely drama of ideas, more truly Shavian in structure and intellectual power (if not, of course, in ideology) than *The Country Girl* and sounding a prophetic voice as the old Bolshevism strikes back in 1991. I recommend *Darkness at Noon* for revival, but I'm not holding my breath.

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Books

Dostoevsky's idiom

by Vasily Rudich

The name of Russia's greatest writer is Tolstoevsky—or so goes an old, and still popular, academic joke. The joke does, however, have a point. It satirizes a certain vague idea about Russian literature that is shared by many American readers: the idea that Russian literature is a confusing and exotic, if not entirely alien phenomenon, a tantalizing exposure to the "mysterious Russian soul," perpetually centered on what used to be known as "the ultimate problems of human existence"—those problems, at any rate, that are beyond the reach of our everyday cares and concerns. This stereotypical perception allows for little difference between the individual authors, be they Ivan Turgenev or Boris Pasternak, and accounts for a telling comment made by one of my acquaintances: "Why don't all these guys [he meant typical characters from a Russian novel] just start looking for a job?"

As for the joke about "Tolstoevsky," it certainly would have offended the author of *The Brothers Karamazov*. While it is true that Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy were both impassioned idealists engaged in a religious quest, they privately distrusted and disliked each other. Dostoevsky, for example, once called Tolstoy "a sugary talent" and complained that his characters "are uninteresting to the point of strangeness."

At the same time, a jocular amalgamation of the two authors into one "Tolstoevsky" points to an additional problem, less philosophical, perhaps, but no less perplexing—and this time not the reader's fault. It concerns the endemic inferiority of the extant English translations from the Russian, most of which do little justice to the verbal beauty of the originals. Too often great Russian prose, past or present, has been "Englished" in conformity with some prevailing literary fashion, which naturally results in language lacking the personal inspiration and stylistic imprint of the original. Not surprisingly, the result is a "Tolstoevsky," a more or less characterless composite. Ironically, this approach to translation has on occasion improved upon Tolstoy, a writer who professed (and practiced) a lack of interest in formal refinement. But when applied to Dostoevsky, this procedure has had a disastrous effect, often aggravated by the translator's inability to appreciate or convey the multiple semantic and syntactical nuances that make the language of Dostoevsky's novels so superbly individual.

The introduction to the new translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* promises to remedy this fault.[1] At almost eight hundred pages, the translation was a risky and noble venture on the part of a small publishing house, North Point Press—and one cannot help being saddened by the news that North

1 *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated from the Russian and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky; North Point Press, 796 pages, $29.95.

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Point will no longer be publishing new books. The husband-and-wife team who translated *The Brothers Karamazov* anew seems well suited for the task. Richard Pevear is a poet of repute who has also translated both poetry and prose from several tongues; Larissa Volokhonsky is a Russian émigrée, a professional translator, and a student of theology (a clear advantage when approaching Dostoevsky). The pair has chosen to adopt an elevated view of their craft, following in this a practice still common in Russia, where translation is considered an art requiring born talent and professionalism. The difficulties they faced were formidable indeed. Here it may suffice to indicate only a few.

The Russian literary language was created early in the nineteenth century largely through the efforts and genius of Alexander Pushkin, who enjoys in the eyes of Russians a status comparable to that which Shakespeare or Goethe enjoys here. This language was developed by the great stylists of the later nineteenth century, notably Ivan Turgenev and Anton Chekhov, and in this century by those who (like Ivan Bunin or Mikhail Bulgakov) realized their stylistic aims by further refining the idiom approved by literary tradition. Insofar as their work reproduces this "classical" idiom they can be rendered accurately into standard literary English.

This must be sharply contrasted with Dostoevsky's writing. Drawing on the example of Nikolai Gogol, Dostoevsky fashioned a literary technique with a whole new set of priorities. Instead of working with the established idiom, writers in this tradition —among them such prominent modern writers as Evgeny Zamyatin and Andrei Platonov or, for that matter, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—proceeded to explore and exploit unconventional layers of the vernacular: dialect, jargon, slang, cant, and the like.

Already in his very first publication, the short novel *Poor Folk*, Dostoevsky surprised readers with a skillful imitation of semi-educated speech, and in his later work he revealed an unsurpassed mastery over his medium, employing an incredible variety of stylistic means. It remains uncertain whether Dostoevsky actually possessed—as did some of his followers—a conscious and articulate program regarding language and style. But his notebooks leave no doubt that he paid exceptional attention to vocabulary, registering characteristic or unusual words, playing them out, placing them in different contexts, plagiarizing, with equal relish, from a priest or a policeman or a streetwalker.

In any event, it seems likely that Dostoevsky owes much of his verbal virtuosity to intuition rather than deliberate strategy. In every case, his word choice, however bizarre it first appears, makes the most accurate and meaningful response to the momentary situation created by the plot or a character's immediate experience. A striking replacement of an anticipated commonplace is fraught with subtle implications, often recognized by the reader only in retrospect. Much of Dostoevsky's magic spell lies in the unpredictability of his narrative, extending from philosophical or psychological argument to matters of syntax and even grammar. The result is that the idiosyncrasies of content and style for which he was berated in his own time are things for which he is admired by posterity. In fact, reading Dostoevsky in the original, one has to fight the impression that he writes in a language that no one speaks and, very possibly, no one ever spoke. His idiom is principally derived from the vocabulary of the period's petty urban officials, the milieu Dostoevsky knew best. When this peculiar idiom is applied to grand, metaphysical questions, it is transformed and suddenly acquires a higher significance. The effect is uncanny, verging on the irrational and the fantastic. This accounts in part for the peculiar ambiance, so easily lost in translation, of the Dostoevskian world, where characters, though graphically shaped, appear, as if "through a glass darkly," both smaller and larger than life.

Several pivotal chapters in *The Brothers Karamazov* exhibit a complex and careful interplay of stylistic elements alien to common speech. Pevear and Volokhonsky's response to the challenge of these complexities makes

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palpable both the felicities and the failures of their new translation. Dostoevsky articulated some of his deepest spiritual commitments in those portions of the novel devoted to the elder Zosima, who was meant to portray the ideal Christian. Dostoevsky's success with Zosima—so far as generations of Russian readers are concerned, at least—owes much to his judicious use of the archaisms and poeticisms provided by the residue of Church Slavonic that continues to function, even for present-day literature, as a source of occasional verbal enrichment. The very tenor of Zosima's speech, his collected sayings, his "hagiography" composed by Alyosha Karamazov, are highly stylized and permeated with Slavonicisms. The difficulty of rendering all this into English is exceedingly formidable. One promising device that has not been sufficiently exploited by translators —possibly out of the fear of sounding contrived—is adopting a pattern of allusion to the King James version of the Bible. This might sometimes create an effect comparable to that of Church Slavonic.

While the new translation often fails to capture such stylistic nuances, it is a definite improvement upon its predecessors. For example, when Pevear and Volokhonsky have the dying Father Zosima say, "I shall not die before I have once more drunk deeply of conversation with you, beloved of my heart," they are right to do so, even if it sounds somewhat risqué. The elder means exactly what he says: The imagery of spiritual "drink," common in religious tracts, is here crucial and cannot be glossed over by a mere "delight," as in the Garnett-Matlaw translation, or by "enjoying," as in Andrew H. McAndrew's, nor can it be replaced by "tasting to the full the joy" as in David Magarshack's. Pevear and Volokhonsky render the rest of the pronouncement as follows: ". . . before I have looked upon your dear faces and poured out my soul to you once more." The original employs an idiom of great verbal resonance, but one that defies any precise translation. The key word, *liki* (for which English has no equivalent), here translated as "faces," differs from the conventional *litsa* by emphasizing the ideal, God-like aspect of the human appearance—*imago Dei*—as it is represented, for instance, on the Orthodox icon. Nor is it possible for a translator to reproduce the inverse word order that makes Father Zosima's speech captivatingly rhythmic and endows it with an added air of sanctity.

Ivan Karamazov's prose poem, "The Grand Inquisitor," is arguably the most famous passage in all of Dostoevsky. The stylistic fabric of the legend is very intricate and is fraught with multiple ironies: the Inquisitor's irony aimed at Christ, Ivan's aimed both at Christ and at the Inquisitor, Dostoevsky's own aimed both at the Inquisitor and at Ivan. On the verbal level, Dostoevsky achieves this ironic polyphony through a skillful use of rhetoric, fusing, for example, the vulgar with the sublime in ways that only appear casual. The new translation is again superior to previous efforts in rendering these rhetorical effects, but it, too, suffers from a familiar host of problems Though accurate, it sometimes lacks force; though inventive, it occasionally pains the ear with an unintended platitude. (Dostoevsky is often vulgar, but never trivial: his platitudes are all intentional.) For the most part, however, it works and even manages to convey something of the melody of this peculiar prose that borders on blank verse. For example, when the Inquisitor expatiates on miracle, mystery, and authority, and on mankind's need to adore, Pevear and Volokhonsky have him say:

> "There is no more ceaseless or tormenting care for man, as long as he remains free, than to find someone to bow down to as soon as possible. But man seeks to bow down before that which is indisputable, so indisputable that all men at once would agree to the universal worship of it. For the care of these pitiful creatures is not just to find something before which I or some other man can bow down, but to find something that everyone else will also believe in and bow down to, for it must needs be *all together*. And this need for *communality* of worship is the chief torment of each man individually, and of mankind as a whole, from the beginning of the ages."

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The key word in this passage had uniformly been rendered as "worship" by the earlier translators. The new choice of "bow down" is happier, not only as a calque, but also because it captures the implication that human nature stands permanently in need of humiliation, a striking undercurrent in the Inquisitor's political thought. The Russian text, however, continues to use the same word or root right to the end of the speech, with the effect of accumulated sarcasm, while the translation switches back to the more conventional "worship," presumably to avoid awkwardness.

The ideological symphony of the novel finds its climax in the episode of Ivan Karamazov's encounter with the devil. This is Dostoevsky's *tour de force*, which prefigures in its melding of delusion and reality the art of James, Joyce, and Nabokov. Although it remains uncertain whether Ivan has experienced a supernatural event and has been visited by the unbidden guest from beyond, or whether he has merely fallen victim to hallucination, his interlocutor appears endowed with his own distinctive voice. His speech is a masterly satire of secularist argument, reflecting on, echoing, and parodying the opinions of Ivan himself and of Smerdyakov, his unsavory double. At the very peak of his harangue, the devil revels in pathetic profanation of the sublime, infusing it with sentimentality:

> "I was there when the Word who died on the cross was ascending into heaven, carrying on his bosom the soul of the thief who was crucified to the right of him, I heard the joyful shrieks of the cherubim singing and shouting 'Hosannah,' and the thundering shout of rapture from the seraphim, which made heaven and all creation shake. And, I swear by all that's holy, I wanted to join the chorus and shout 'Hosannah' with everyone else. It was right on my lips, it was already bursting from my breast . . . you know, I'm very sensitive and artistically susceptible. But common sense—oh, it's the most unfortunate quality of my nature—kept me within due bounds even then, and I missed the moment!"

This is a competent rendering, though one regrets that the translators followed their predecessors in making the cherubim "shriek" and the seraphim "shout." The Russian original is much stronger, suggesting a devilish dissonance mocking the highest point of human history: perhaps "squeal" and "howl" would have better suggested this.

The new translation fares better in its treatment of mundane affairs. It is best dealing with scenes of scandal—which were, incidentally, Dostoevsky's own forte. Scandal in his world is intimately linked to confession, to moments that reveal one's true nature. Here is Fyodor Pavlovich playing the clown before the elder Zosima:

> "Precisely, precisely, it feels good to be offended. You put it so well, I've never heard it before. Precisely, precisely, all my life I've been getting offended for the pleasure of it, for the aesthetics of it, because it's not only a pleasure, sometimes it's beautiful to be offended—you forgot that, great elder: beautiful! I'll make a note of that! And I've lied, I've lied decidedly all my life, every day and every hour. Verily, I am a lie and the father of a lie! Or maybe not the father of a lie, I always get my texts mixed up; let's say the son of a lie, that will do just as well!"

Here is Grushenka showing off before her rival in love, Katerina:

> "Now you see, worthy young lady, how wicked and willful I am next to you. Whatever I want, I will do. Maybe I just promised you something, but now I am thinking: what if I like him again, all of a sudden—Mitya, I mean—because I did like him once very much, I liked him for almost a whole hour. So, maybe I'll go now and tell him to stay with me starting to-day . . . That's how fickle I am."

And here is Mitya giving fright to Alyosha:

> "You know me by now: a scoundrel, an avowed scoundrel! But know that whatever I have done before or now or may do later—nothing, nothing can compare in baseness with the dishonor I am carrying, precisely now, precisely at this

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> moment, here on my chest, here, right here, which is being enacted and carried out, and which is fully in my power to stop, I can stop it or carry it out, make a note of that! And know, then, that I will carry it out and will not stop it."

All three are exhibitionists, and each indulges—or pretends to indulge—in soul searching. But it is their individual diction, to some degree captured by this translation, that makes the reader appreciate in full measure the father's blasphemous self-abasement, the son's exuberant self-torment, and the ruthless self-infatuation of the woman whom they share.

In pointing out the failings and flaws of this new translation, I do not mean to suggest that the translators have done a poor job. Pevear and Volokhonsky definitely improve on previous efforts, and the sheer volume of work makes their achievement nearly heroic. To their credit, they have escaped the temptation to modernize Dostoevsky's language and to embroider it with current slang. They claim that his prose should not be revised, corrected, or smoothed over since "a truer rendering of Dostoevsky's style would restore missing dimensions to the book," and they often hold to their word: their accomplishment confirms the validity of their methods. Nevertheless, on too many occasions, a native speaker of Russian will feel that their choice of a word or phrase could have been bolder or that there was room for further verbal or syntactical irregularity without compromising the fabric of English.

Still, if this new translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* leaves a Russian speaker with a sense of frustration, it is not because the translators lacked talent or diligence. It arises rather from the impossibility of the task. The structures of English and Russian are little compatible, and the eccentricity of Dostoevsky's idiom makes the gap between them all but unbridgeable. The many merits of the new translation notwithstanding, the novel's innumerable literary gems are bound to remain unfathomable and unsuspected by the reader who is innocent of Russian. English simply cannot plausibly duplicate Dostoevsky's favorite devices, his inverted word order, his abuse of diminutives, his interplay of Latinisms and vulgarisms that often serve to indicate double-think or to insinuate a touch of hysteria on the part of the characters or the narrator. This is the reason that the new—and, for that matter, any other—translation necessarily falls short of what we would wish. There is no way around it: One must master Russian to enjoy the novel in full. Failing that, Dostoevsky enthusiasts may be advised to make use of Victor Terras's admirable *A Karamazov Companion* (1981), which describes and elucidates most of the ambiguities and stylistic quirks of the original.

The impossibility of a perfect translation raises yet another issue and gives support to an unfashionable position. For the fact that all translations are in some sense "failures" suggests that, in the end, style in a work of literature is subordinate to the message. No amount of skill can produce a translation (into any tongue) that does full justice to Dostoevsky's innovative and idiosyncratic rhetoric; no amount of skill can furnish a foreign reader with the literary experience a native enjoys. Dostoevsky's message, however, has been transmitted across languages, nations, and races around the world and has profoundly influenced our century's cultural and psychological landscape. By excessive concentration on the aspects of form, lesser talent often undercuts both the appeal and the availability of his work. But a work of true genius transcends every formal limitation, even that of language, and arrives at the universal.

The historian's craft

Carole Fink Marc Bloch: A Life in History. Cambridge University Press, 371 pages, $29.95

reviewed by Mark Falcoff

Those Americans for whom the name Marc Bloch has meaning probably first encoun-

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tered it in the mid-1960s; it was then, some twenty years after the French historian's death, that his more successful books began to appear in English. *The Historian's Craft* (1963) is a charming, if regrettably unfinished, account of what historians do (or should try to do); *Strange Defeat* (1967) is a personal reflection on the causes of France's sudden collapse in 1940; *Feudal Society* (1961)—a hefty, initially rather forbidding tome—proves that vast, even massive learning can be worn (as well as absorbed) lightly and well. Carole Fink's masterly biography now reveals the unsuspectedly dramatic details which shaped and determined the man's life and work.

Born in Lyon in 1886, Bloch was the scion of a family of Alsatian Jews who had become assimilated into French life after the emancipation decrees of the 1790s. His father, Gustave Bloch, was a scholar of ancient history who taught at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, and subsequently at the Sorbonne. As Fink explains it, "Gustave Bloch was one of the group of assimilated Jewish savants who, encouraged by the liberal, reformist atmosphere and institutions of the Third Republic, entered disciplines once alien to their people." Marc Bloch followed a similar trajectory, rising to even higher achievement but—this is perhaps the point of Fink's book—under far less propitious circumstances.

A *normalien* like his father, Bloch went on to teach history at lycées in Montepellier (1912) and Amiens (1913-14) until the outbreak of World War I. After four years of dedicated military service (during which he was wounded and twice decorated for conspicuous performance on the battlefield) Bloch resumed his academic career at the University of Strasbourg, in a region which had been wrested from France after 1870 and restored to it by the Treaty of Versailles. There he wrote some of his most important works on medieval history and French rural history, and, together with an older colleague, Lucien Febvre, founded *Annales*, "a national review with international spirit," the most unusual and creative historical journal of its day.

After a dozen years at Strasbourg, Febvre went to the Collège de France in Paris, and Bloch—bored with the provinciality of Alsace and frustrated by his distance from France's most important libraries and archives—sought to follow him there. A combination of circumstantial misfortunes, including academic politics and budget cuts (and also, for the first time in Bloch's career, a rising tide of anti-Semitism), prevented him from doing so. Eventually, however, he was appointed to the Sorbonne, only to see his career once again interrupted by war (1939-40). Though exempt from service because of the large number of his dependents (a wife, five children, and an aged mother), Bloch voluntarily returned to the army in which he had served nearly twenty years before.

Demobilized after the armistice, he suddenly found himself an outsider in his own country, as the collaborationist Vichy regime sought to placate its German overlords by imitating Hitler's racially exclusionary legislation. Nonetheless, thanks to his scholarly repute, as well as to the personal esteem in which he was held by certain highly placed ideological adversaries (including the Vichy minister of education), Bloch was able to win specific exemption from the anti-Semitic laws and to continue teaching, first at Clermont-Ferrand, then at Montepellier.

Meanwhile, friends in the United States successfully won a place for him at the New School for Social Research, a visa, and financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation. At first Bloch seemed ready to emigrate, but decided against it when it became clear that he would have to leave behind his sons and also his aged mother. Fink's account of the tortuous, ultimately fruitless negotiations between Bloch, the New School, the State Department, and the Rockefeller Foundation makes for a frustrating, melancholy read. Fink argues, however, that to some degree Bloch purposely raised obstacles because, in the final analysis, he did not really wish to leave France.

As the fortunes of war turned against the Axis, Bloch's professional situation began to

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deteriorate. The relative autonomy of the Vichy regime had been premised on Hitler's sense of self-confidence, and once this was threatened by Allied landings in North Africa, the regime was pressured to purge its more "moderate" elements; Catholic traditionists were replaced by rabidly racist Germanophiles, who in turn promptly abolished the exemptions which made it possible for Jews to teach. Thus at the relatively early age of fifty-six, Bloch found himself unemployed; the only outlet for constructive, patriotic work was the Resistance, so it cannot be surprising that he eventually found his way into its ranks. In 1943 Bloch moved to Lyon, where he led a double life as a traveling businessman, "M. Blanchard," and as the inspector of Resistance operatives in the region. Bloch's great hope was that the Allies would win the war faster than Pétain's secret police could find and arrest him; it was a gamble he lost. Apprehended in 1944, he was shot a mere ten days after the Allies had successfully landed in Normandy.

Such are the bare bones of a much more compelling tale: to tell it, Fink plunges deeply and authoritatively into the history of the Alsatian Jewish community; the Byzantine world of French academic politics; the triumph and unexpected reversal of the secular ideals of the Third Republic; above all, the creation of an entirely new school of historical research. And then there is the evocation of the figure of Bloch himself: a thoroughgoing bourgeois in taste, manners, and dress; a family man; a tireless researcher and a generous teacher; an intense if idealistic patriot. (One must suppress the question of whether the New School would be quite so eager today to offer a chair to a man with these characteristics—leave aside Duke, Stanford, or Yale, or, for that matter, any major state university in this country.)

Fink also reminds us of the truly revolutionary contribution of Bloch, Febvre, and their associates to European historiography. Before the First World War, the entire profession of history in most countries was regarded as an extension of civic education. Historical journals in one country were often reluctant to accept articles by scholars in another. In both Germany and France territorial disputes were read back into ancient times, with much emphasis on the supposed "Germanic" or "Gallic" characteristics of premodern peoples who could not possibly have imagined themselves as such. Likewise, political and diplomatic history was often nothing more than special pleading for contemporary policies or aspirations. The rise of Marxism merely added another grand theory to distort the past, replacing the abstract concept of "nation" with another, equally imaginary construct, "class."

What Bloch did was to break up the existing boundaries of the profession, reinvigorating it through the introduction of "better tools, more erudition, fewer rules and restrictions, more breadth and curiosity." He also expanded its disciplinary range to encompass the newer sciences of psychology and cultural anthropology. Above all, Bloch urged upon his students an entirely new attitude toward the past. "Exceptions, mutations, lag and precocity—untimely, unplanned, uneven development" were the things which particularly fascinated Bloch and his colleague Febvre, and which through the *Annales* they urged upon historians, French and foreign. Bloch also possessed a highly developed sense of irony, a kind of mature, critical perspective which Americans tend to associate with the European temperament (but which in fact is found in that part of the world less often than one might expect).

In spite of a final chapter in which Fink traces Bloch's enduring influence on French historiography, one cannot be certain that the advances which he and his associates achieved during their lifetimes have been fully consolidated. The *Annales* I knew as a graduate student in the 1960s was pompous, pretentious, and dull—certainly nothing at all like Fink's description of that journal in the days when it was edited by Bloch and Febvre; as for Fernand Braudel, whom she apparently regards as the intellectual successor to this tradition, it is clear that whatever else he might be, he is not a historian. More to

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the point, the historical profession seems to be rapidly backsliding into the vices from which Bloch worked so hard to liberate it: deterministic theories of history have returned to the academy with renewed force —this time under the rubric of "race-" and "gender-specific" categories. In fact if a recent advertisement in *The New Republic* is correct, nowhere is this trend stronger than at the New School itself.

What makes *Marc Bloch: A Life in History* particularly memorable is, in fact, the author's uninhibited methodological traditionalism. Written in a sober, elegant style by a writer with a sure grasp on a vast range of materials, it represents a major contribution to several fields, including (perhaps surprisingly) French military history. It is an eloquent tribute to a life lived fearlessly in the service of intellectual integrity. And it demonstrates something which cannot be repeated often enough—that the life of the mind can be the greatest adventure of all.

After Diaghilev

Vicente García-Márquez The Ballets Russes: Colonel de Basil's Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, 1932-1952.
Knopf, 343 pages, $50

reviewed by Moira Hodgson

De Basil's Ballets Russes has had an uncertain position in the history of twentieth-century dance. It has often been dismissed as nothing more than a hack company, put together by a fake Russian colonel with a flair for publicity who knew how to milk the Diaghilev legend for all it was worth. A new book by Vicente García-Márquez sets out to correct this view. Despite its dubious reputation, de Basil's company, the author asserts, made contributions of real worth that are often overlooked in the wake of the scandals and intrigues that plagued it during its volatile career.

When Serge Diaghilev died in 1929, it seemed that the glorious era of Russian ballet had come to an end. The company that had brought Nijinsky, Pavlova, Bolm, and Karsavina to Paris, and had introduced the work of choreographers Fokine, Massine, and Balanchine, disbanded; the famous sets by Bakst, Benois, and Picasso were relegated to storage. Two years later Anna Pavlova, who had left Diaghilev to form her own touring group, died. In the ballet world, there was, as the British critic Arnold Haskell put it, "a terrifying silence."

But within three years, a former officer in the Russian army, Vassili Grigorievitch Voskrensky—better known as Colonel Wassily de Basil—and René Blum, the impresario at the Casino de Monte Carlo, had put together a second Ballets Russes. The company not only retained the best of the Diaghilev repertoire (thanks to the prodigious memory of Serge Grigoriev, his régisseur) but was to produce some revolutionary choreography as well as first-rate revivals before it gradually fell into decline, folding six months after the death of Colonel de Basil in 1951.

To emphasize his point, García-Márquez puts the history of de Basil's company in the context of the repertory. Accompanying his text with fascinating photographs, he evokes the making of the ballets—their music, libretti, choreography, and decor—and the critical reception of each production in painstaking detail. There were twenty-eight new works produced between 1932 and 1948, and García-Márquez's meticulous reconstruction of them, along with recollections of the participants, make you wish you'd been there to see them. Indeed, any one of them would probably make for a far more interesting evening than much of the new choreography showing up in ballet companies today.

The works produced by the second Ballets Russes, says García-Márquez, "marked the pivotal beginning of a new artistic freedom and aesthetic expression. They revived the public's interest in nineteenth-century classicism, and also developed the integration of dance and music that had begun with *Les Sylphides.* Balanchine's *Cotillon* and Massine's

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Jeux d'Enfants, both created in 1932 with libretti by Kochno, had no literal story and were consistently set in terms of dance. The following year Massine's *Les Présages*, set to Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, opened a new chapter in ballet history as the first symphonic ballet in the West to explore a new structure, theme, and choreographic syntax."

During its twenty years of existence, the troupe was joined by Alexandra Danilova, Alicia Markova, Anton Dolin, and David Lichine (the latter choreographed many ballets for de Basil, including *Graduation Ball* and *Protée*). Artists who designed for it included de Chirico, Miró, Derain, Dufy, and Masson; Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff, and Auric contributed music.

Balanchine, Diaghilev's last ballet master, who was hired at the start, left after only a few months, despite the enticement of working with his brilliant young discoveries, the famous "baby ballerinas" Irina Baronova, Tamara Toumanova, and Tatiana Riabouchinska. Both he and the librettist Boris Kochno disliked the dictatorial methods of de Basil and Blum, who they felt were more interested in peddling nostalgia than in looking for new ideas.

"Unfortunately [the company] took its own existence for granted, drawing more and more heavily on the Diaghilev repertoire and giving its young dancers less and less time to assimilate its subtleties," commented Haskell writing in London. "Let us be quite fair. Economics play their part. Diaghilev could find a backer when driven to the wall, de Basil must play all the year round to keep his large company alive." De Basil ruled like a dictator—but he did not have Diaghilev's artistic sensibility and taste. Whereas Diaghilev gave the public what he wanted, de Basil gave the public what he thought they wanted. The latter's *succès de scandale* were of a different order. The company developed a huge following of devoted fans—of the sort who call the dancers by their first names and hang around the stage door looking for autographs.

In eight years de Basil changed the company's name six times and he was constantly involved in litigation. The machinations and in-fighting take on the aspect of a farce. By 1939 he was in competition with another Ballet Russe, this one directed by Sergei Denham and Blum, who had left him (de Basil called his company the Original Ballet Russe while Denham named his the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo).

"They started with the Diaghilev capital and goodwill which they succeeded in dissipating within five years," wrote Sacheverell Sitwell in 1950. "They quarrelled among themselves, enriched the legal profession, gave a bumper advertisement to the great little Principality, and then split into fragments each one but a faint echo of the original. In vain one searches for new ideas. And yet there had never been more undeveloped dancing talents awaiting inspired leadership."

Certainly, much of what Sitwell says holds true—and by the end, even the dancing had deteriorated. But in its first five or six years the company saw the production of some remarkable works. García-Márquez is particularly interesting about Léonide Massine, who created three new symphonic ballets to music by Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and Berlioz before he split from de Basil in 1938. (His departure initiated a whole series of lawsuits over copyright to his works.)

"When the Ballets Russes danced Massine's ballets," writes García-Márquez, "the feeling of improvisation was palpable and the air of spontaneity brought each performance to special life. Each gesture seemed to be happening for the first time, with a complete naturalness and sincerity. This is one of the reasons why modern revivals of Massine's works are often deemed ineffective. In the Ballets Russes performances, every solo role was taken by a personality. In an interview for French television . . . Massine was asked if his works were not performed anymore because they were démodé. His answer: 'Certainly not. There are no more dancers who could perform them.'"

Indeed, finding young dancers today who

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can act at all is a difficult task. Many are technically prodigious but few are capable of projecting emotion in those ballets that require it. In *Symphonie fantastique*, choreographed in 1936 to music by Berlioz and with sets by Bérard, Massine had one of his greatest roles as the young romantic musician, who is both protagonist and narrator of the action. "Attempting to convey Berlioz's candid exposition of his emotional life, Massine tried to make visible in his performance the romantic qualities of the music, not by means of exaggerated facial expressions but by the intensity of his performance, which allowed him to dominate the stage even while remaining practically motionless. This power was felt by all who worked with him."

The dancers contributed to the development of the characters they played, working on them like actors (Stanislavski was a major influence on Massine). He placed them in roles that best suited them, giving them the freedom to make the role their own. His main interest was to develop each character as an expression of personal gesture (in the symphonies, especially in the Brahms, he stressed the formation of groups).

Nijinska choreographed *Les Cent Baisers* in 1935, to music by d'Erlanger and with a libretto by Boris Kochno after a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. Her choreography followed a middle course between Massine's and Balanchine's. García-Márquez quotes Baronova: "There was not much experimentation, as [there had been] with Massine. Her choreography always seemed to flow spontaneously. Even when she was improvising, she always projected the conviction that she knew her ultimate goals, for she was precise and direct in her explanations." And Baronova adds the wonderful detail that became a legend among dancers who worked with Nijinska, "She smoked continuously with a cigarette holder, wore trousers and incredibly white kid gloves because she disliked touching a sweaty body."

Fokine returned in 1937 to revive *Les Sylphides* with Riabouchinska, whose version of the Prelude became world-famous. Fokine was extraordinarily demanding of his dancers. Riabouchinska recalled that at one point in this ballet she had "to bourrée backwards—in a cambré [i.e., arched] position —from upstage to center stage, with arms softly coming to the side. . . . Then, almost by accident, by surprise, to turn to take the last pose before rushing off."

Fokine was equally hard on conductors. One evening, during a rehearsal of *Prince Igor*, he became so annoyed by Sir Thomas Beecham's tempo that he started to clap time. When the angry conductor walked off, Fokine stepped to the podium and instructed the orchestra, "from number twelve, please."

Balanchine returned as guest choreographer during the American tour of 1940-41, the first and last time since his departure in 1932. *Balustrade*, set to Stravinsky's Violin Concerto and with a set by Tchelitchev, was a milestone in his development, as *Cotillon* had been nearly a decade earlier. As García-Márquez writes, "It inaugurated the forties, a prolific decade during which he was to establish definite stylistic preferences and choreographic syntax." Edwin Denby called the style of this ballet "direct new classicism." (Later Balanchine did a new ballet to the same score, called simply *Stravinsky Violin Concerto*).

There may have been no Diaghilev to guide and supervise it, but de Basil's company extended the frontiers of ballet, particularly in America, where in spite of the presence of Fokine and other Russian masters, it had been reduced to a standing barely above that of the music hall. It was essentially Balanchine, brought over by Lincoln Kirstein in 1933 (the same year the company had its first big American success), who made American ballet what it is today, but the Ballets Russes brought Diaghilev's legacy to the United States, and educated the public through months of one-night stands across the country. And as García-Márquez points out, the tradition of ballet is handed over from teacher to pupil. Many of the dancers from de Basil's Ballets Russes are still teaching today, keeping a tradition alive, half a century after the death of Diaghilev.

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Shorter notices

Howard C. Horsford and Lynn Horth, editors
Journals: The Writings of Herman Melville, Volume 15. Northwestern University Press/ The Newberry Library, 683 pages, $69.95; $20.95 paper

Between 1849 and 1860, Herman Melville undertook three extended sea voyages. These trips occasioned three journals, the only ones Melville is known to have kept. The journals from the first and last voyages are both disappointing. The first, a chronicle of Melville's trip to London in 1849, consists mainly of notes on the pubs he visited, the people he met, and his dealings with publishers; the last, from an 1860 "health-excursion" from Boston to San Francisco, is made up largely of notes on the weather. The ostensible purpose of the London trip was to negotiate the British sale of his most recent novel, *White-Jacket*. In truth, Melville, unhappy with his new responsibilities as a father and husband, wanted escape. He resented the role of breadwinner, and was keenly embarrassed not only by the hastily written *White-Jacket*, but also by its predecessor, *Redburn*, both of which he considered strictly commercial ventures. He would never recapture the sales or critical acclaim that had greeted his first two books, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847).

The second, most important, journal covers Melville's 1856-57 voyage—also without his family—to Europe and the Middle East. Once again, the motive was escape. This time, however, Melville had good reason: he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Both *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Pierre* (1852) had been savaged by the critics. The books sold poorly, and Melville was deep in debt. An 1853 fire at Harper & Brothers, which destroyed nearly all the copies of his books, must have seemed the final indignity. (Actually, the final indignity —a twenty year stint as a customs inspector in New York City—was to come.)

No wonder, then, that Melville in these journals is as gloomy as the prospect of death. The hapless souls who cross his path are usually some combination of idleness, duplicity, and spiritual vulgarity. The towns he visits, meanwhile, are hothouses of filth, decay, and squalor. And the dunes, which Melville thought might help purge his soul, are barrenness itself. On seeing Judea, he writes:

> Whitish mildew pervading whole tracts of landscape—bleached—leprosy—encrustation of curses—old cheese—bones of rocks,—crunched, knawed, & mumbled—mere refuse & rubbish of creation—like that laying outside of Jaffa Gate—all Judea seems to have been accumulations of this rubbish [. . .] You see the anatomy—compares with ordinary regions as skeleton with living & rosy man.—No moss as in other ruins—no grace of decay—no ivy—The unleavened nakedness of desolation—

Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre, meanwhile, with its eager pilgrims milling about, Melville brands a "sickening cheat." Of the island of Patmos, the author says that he "Could no more realize that St. John had ever had revelations here, than when off Juan Fernandez, could beleive [*sic*] in Robinson Crusoe according to DeFoe." In Cairo, Melville complains that there is "Too much light & no defence against it."

The pyramids of Gaza offer some respite from the gloom. "As long as earth endures," writes Melville, "some vestige will remain of the pyramids." He continues:

> I doubt whether any time spent upon it, would tend to a more precise impression of it. As with the ocean, you learn as much of its vastness by the first five minutes glance as you would in a month. . . . Its simplicity confounds you. Finding it vain to take in its vastness man has taken to sounding it & weighing its density . . . he measures the base, & computes the size of individual stones. It refuses to be studied or adequately comprehended.

Howard C. Horsford, co-editor of the *Journals*, states in his "Historical Note" that Melville's bellyaching is simply a symptom of

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depression. However, something besides an isolated, despondent mind manifests itself in these pages. What seems to have been exposed and crushed, finally, by all the heat and dust was a version of the romantic sensibility. Melville, like other writers of his time—Flaubert and Maxime Du Camp, for example, made a similar journey in 1849, and Mark Twain toured the region in the late 1860s—believed oriental travel to be a restorative for the soul. But for Melville the Orient, instead of providing an antidote to his ills, only confirmed his worst suspicions. "No country will more quickly dissipate romantic expectations than Palestine," writes Melville. "To some the disappointment is heart sickening." Not very long after his return to the United States, Melville chose—in one of the great self-inflicted disasters in the history of American literature—to abandon novels for good.

—*Robert Richman*

Jonathan Cott Wandering Ghost:
The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn.
Knopf, 438 pages, $24.95

No matter where he found himself, the bohemian man of letters Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) longed to be "somewhere else," a place where life was simple, fresh, and free from the smell of the close Victorian parlor. As an unwanted child, half Greek, half Anglo-Irish, abandoned by his parents and raised by strict Dublin relatives, he spent hours alone with books of myths and legends, staring at plates depicting dryads and naiads, graces and muses. As a youthful reporter in Cincinnati he gained fame with his lurid accounts of murders and back-alley goings-on, yet his off-hours were spent reading up on Fourier's utopias and translating the romances of Théophile Gautier. "I ought never to have been born in this century," he wrote in 1879, "because I live forever in dreams of other centuries and other faiths and other ethics—dreams rudely broken by curses in the street below."

This odd and odd-looking man—he stood about five feet tall, and his left eye was blind and sunken—sought out the exotic in the ordinary, and in the 1880s came to the attention of the New York press with his curious dispatches from New Orleans. His writings on the Creole, on their folktales, dance halls, voodoo, and patois, were more than mere local-color sketches, they were cultural anthropology as literature. *Harper's* sent Hearn to the French West Indies, which provided material for a travel book and a novel, and then, in 1890, to Japan. It was Japan, his home for the rest of his life, that inspired most of Hearn's best writing—indeed, twelve of his twenty books are concerned in some way with his adopted country. But the Japan Hearn celebrated in these books—a "somewhere else" of great natural beauty, and of rich religious and folk traditions—was slipping away before his eyes as the country rushed to join the modern world. It is his nostalgic attempt to seize the ghost of the old Japan, an attempt which was so often successful, that makes him still the best-loved English-language writer in that country.

Most of Hearn's books were patchwork affairs, so perhaps it is fitting, if rather unfortunate, that *Wandering Ghost* should be one, too. As Jonathan Cott explains in his introduction, the book was originally conceived as "an anthology of . . . Hearn's articles, essays, letters, and stories, with introductory notes meant to place these writings in the context of Hearn's career." The notes soon grew voluminous, however, and the book took on the character of an "informal biographical reader"—which means, at least in this case, a brief life made long by the clumsy dropping-in, at irregular intervals, of whole texts by the subject, not all of them well chosen. The agreeably unpretentious Mr. Cott makes it clear that he considers himself neither biographer nor anthologist. His great virtue—indeed what carries his uneven book—is that he's an enthusiast. Lafcadio Hearn still awaits a definitive "life," but, in the meanwhile, we have Mr. Cott's enthusiastic "reader" to excite us anew about his works.

—*Christopher Carduff*

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Notebook

For Mozart, poor Mozart

by Dana Mack

It would be hard to name a country which has capitalized on its cultural legacy with such impunity as Austria has. To repeat a well-known joke: Having convinced us that Beethoven was Austrian and Hitler was German, the Austrians rake in the proceeds.

Of course, the Austrian approach to culture does indeed seem cynical when one considers the number of great musicians who went unappreciated there during their lifetimes and are now considered state heroes, among them Mozart, Schubert, Mahler, and Schoenberg. But despite such apparent opportunism, Austria's extensive cultural administration has been primed to the dignity of its purpose, and awakened to the crucial role Austrian high culture has had to play in the support of a national identity.

One of the nice things about postwar Austria, in fact, has been the old-fashioned self-assurance of its cultural institutions—both public and private—and the rigid decorum with which these institutions have managed the always nasty business of public relations. Partly responsible for the reserve in such matters as publicity and ticket sales has been the government's commitment to a carefully apportioned distribution of cultural goods. (Where possible, a certain number of tickets to cultural events have always been set aside for the diplomatic community, political party officials, labor officials, educators, and civil servants.) But one must not forget that there exists a knowledgeable and interested local audience, an audience determined to keep a watchful eye on cultural policy and the maintenance of standards of propriety.

Granted, this fussy audience has not been able to keep the cultural administration from the temptations of cooperation with the tourist industry. And one peculiar lapse into vulgarity characteristic of Austrian musical life throughout this century has been the high-profile promotion of festivals, jubilees, and anniversaries.

It might seem strange to Americans that the staid Austrians were involved in promotional endeavors for music as early as the interwar period, when the Vienna Festival Weeks were inaugurated; or that a 1951 festival was waggishly called "Musikolympiade" ("Musical Olympics"); or that costumed performances of Haydn and Mozart have for some time been offered at the Konzerthaus as summer tourist attractions. But ever since the end of World War I, Austrians have hungered for hard foreign currency and international —especially American—recognition. Thus, such public-relations ruses were widely acknowledged to be the necessary evils of economic, even diplomatic survival—superficial blemishes on an otherwise respectable music scene.

Now, in the bicentennial year of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's death, and in an era of unprecedented prosperity, it appears that a zealous cultural program undertaken in celebration of that composer has taken on a new and preposterous character. Alone, the

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number of musical events dedicated to Mozart—which in the area of Salzburg will average three a day, and in Vienna will total over five hundred this year—presume a tremendous burden on the dignity of the occasion. So do the multitude of publications and *Festschrifte* marking overkill on the subject of the composer's life and his music. Then there is a veritable barrage of television broadcasts bearing such names as "Mozart Evergreens" and "Achtung, Klassik!"—not to mention the weekly televised, five-minute Mozart bicentennial message.

The Vienna Mozart-Büro, a municipal organ that functions as a clearing house for the city's *Mozart-Jahr* events, is sponsoring an "official Mozart video," described by its creators as a "pop . . . contemporary *Image-film.*" In conjunction with a sex- and trend-obsessed monthly magazine, *Basta*, the Mozart-Büro is also responsible for the most publicized event of the Carnival Season: the "Figaro Ball," presented on January 14 at Vienna's City Hall. The Vienna Tourist Board's *Mozart Almanac 1991* advertised this "tribute to the figure of Figaro" as "a grand ball in the style of Mozart's era: masks, fantastic hairstyles, headdresses . . . All the great hairdressers of the world have been invited. Alexandre de Paris . . . has taken the . . . ball under his wing."

The commercial appeals which characterize this Mozart media fusillade are hardly offered as the devil's due. Neither can they be justified, as the Vienna Tourist Bureau pretends to justify them, as the kind of "frivolity" that "Mozart understood." Indeed, what appears on the surface to be a simple hard-sell might actually be the application of a new theory of political economy. It seems, in the wake of a depression in the Loden industry, that Mozart has been seized upon as Austria's most valuable export and image maker. An essay in one recent commemorative book, entitled *Mozart Summa Summarum*, happily identifies him as the "Michael Jackson of the Eighteenth Century." According to an article in the Austrian journal *Wochenpresse*, the author of this essay, one Clemens August Andreae, advised a Salzburg Festival lecture audience as early as 1986 that "the aesthetic success of a work of art depends essentially on its ability to serve the mechanisms of business."

The *Wochenpresse* goes on to reveal that the *Stiftung Mozarteum* recently combined forces with the Howard Marlboro Group and two politicians in the Salzburg provincial government to create a "Mozart 200" logo. The logo was to function as a seal of approval for international events in honor of the Mozart bicentennial, and as an enticement for corporate contributions. The "Mozart 200" committee apparently had great plans for the proceeds from its use; among the committee's pet projects were a film and a musical. *Mozart: The Musical*, however, was not to be, since interest in purchasing the trademark was slight.

The fate of the "Mozart 200" logo might be a source of encouragement to those who, in observing the international cultural scene of the past decade, have come to the conclusion that no idea could be too mercenary or idiotic to fail. Yet, lest we wax sanguine, the centerpiece of "Mozart Year 1991," a mammoth nine-month exhibition at the Vienna Künstlerhaus entitled "Zaubertöne" ("Magic Tones: Mozart in Vienna, 1781-91"), offers a glaring example of a hare-brained project brought to fruition.

Opened in early December of 1990, the exhibition cost seventy million schillings (about seven million dollars) to produce. Of this whopping bill, all but 3.2 million schillings came from the city's coffers. Fully a fifth of the sum reflected construction costs involving a 150-meter-long corridor of recorded sound.

The conception of joining music and *objets d'art* in an exploration of Mozart's life and times seems to have been the responsibility of Berlin's Dr. Marie Louise von Plessen, of the Deutsches Museum; in her own words, Dr. Plessen set out to portray the composer as "a type and subject, but also as an object of his times." A fashionable portrayal, indeed! And for the architectural realization of such sociological fetishism, no less a talent was called

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upon than Gae Aulenti, the Milanese architect responsible for that much disputed mix of art and junk, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

The "Zaubertöne" exhibition's organizers boast that its contents were borrowed from 125 institutions. One wonders, though, to what purpose. For those who might get a kick out of such things, the exhibition has the look, on cursory glance, of a large collection of Mozart memorabilia. Would that it were such a collection! At least memorabilia —while satisfying the perverse fascination of museum curators, today, for turning great artists into just plain guys—would have helped Mozart admirers to complete their perceptions of his brief and touching life.

But aside from manuscripts and letters, most of what is displayed has only the most tenuous connection to the composer's life. In the absence of genuine Mozart artifacts, Plessen, Aulenti, and company have settled for an insipid panorama of the age. Most notable among the mass of incidental material that they have gathered from provincial collections are the tired period sketches of Johann Ziegler and Carl Schutz, which cover the physical attributes of late-eighteenth-century Vienna, and a profusion of portraits of contemporaries—kings, noblemen, artists, and philosophers—by minor talents.

In a section entitled "Ladies' Fashion," eighteenth-century dresses are displayed. There are descriptive excursions into the subjects of prostitution, the French Revolution, even botanical studies. Only slightly more relevant to Mozart's existence is a display of Franz Anton Mesmer's therapeutic instruments (Mesmer, perhaps the most famous medical quack who ever lived, was a patron of Mozart's); there are ceremonial objects from a Masonic lodge, a hammerklavier on which Mozart "is supposed to have played once," and a multitude of quotidian paraphernalia of the type the composer might have used. The highlights of this last category include a travel toilet and *necessaire*, a billiard table (accompanied by the deadpan observation that "Mozart was a passionate billiard player"),[1] and a set of birthing implements.

In an attempt to lend meaning to what are essentially archeological minutiae, the exhibition often relies on Mozart's ingenuous wit. By the portable commode, for example, we read the composer's complaint, in a 1780 letter to his father, of the strain of travel on his backside. But need it be said that such diverting commentary on everyday life lends precious little insight into the "magic tones" which offer the pretext for the exhibition, and which are supposed to accompany the visitor through its narrow passageways?

In fact, in his introductory comments in the catalogue, Otto Brussoti, responsible for the realization of the exposition's music program, admits Mozart's seeming equanimity as regarded the events and conditions of his day, and the irrelevance of everyday objects to an understanding of his musical genius. Brussoti also amusingly suggests that the exhibition provides the visitor with an ideal opportunity to experience the power of Mozart's music to overcome the barriers of time and place.

Alas, one would not know it to listen to the eighteen collages of musical excerpts strung together by the Philips record company for the exhibition's purpose. These are, for the most part, barely audible. And the excerpts themselves—lifted from the company's new CD release of the complete works of Mozart—are about as representative of Mozart's genius as the tip of a nose lifted from *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* would be representative of Picasso's. Philips's musical high points—where they are not jumbled together between sections of the exhibit, or drowned out by the voices of guides—do have the fast payoff effect of advertising jingles. And this is hardly accidental. One of the few private sponsors of the exhibition, the company has devoted one of its rooms to a CD display. Here, a Mozart neophyte even has the opportunity to purchase a sampler, performed by "*Weltstars*."

Indeed, the fact that Philips's impertinent medley of Mozart classics provides back-

1 Mozart might have been more accurately described as a *compulsive* billiard player; he lost a lot of money at the game.

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ground music for a tidy arrangement of ancillary items makes the Künstlerhaus exhibit more evocative of a twentieth-century supermarket than of eighteenth-century cultural life. And this impression is only solidified when one encounters the piles of schlock on sale at the Künstlerhaus store—Mozart scarfs, Mozart key chains, Mozart pens, Mozart coasters, Mozart ashtrays, Mozart playing cards, even a Mozart T-shirt emblazoned with the poor composer's throwaway comment, "If I had to marry every woman with whom I've played around . . ."

There is, of course, nothing new in the use of Mozart's name for the purposes of lending dignity to commercial enterprises. Witness the international success of the marzipan-and-chocolate *Mozartkugel*, the host of Viennese "Mozart" cafés, and the plethora of Mozart souvenirs available long before anyone gave a thought to this monumental bicentennial. But such enterprises have employed the name as a harmless enticement, without directly touching the man or his music. This relentless exploitation of Mozart, the *musician*, as a thoroughly modern media package —worse, as just one more scrap for the scrap heap of history—seems sadly indicative of an increasing irreverence for art and the mysterious gift of genius.

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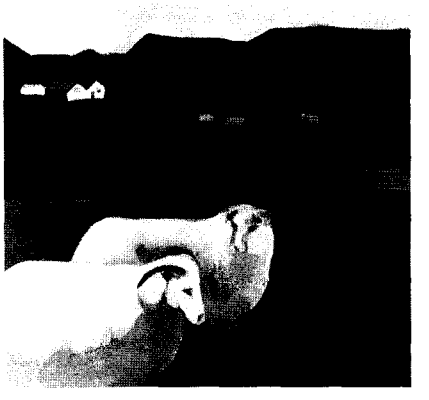

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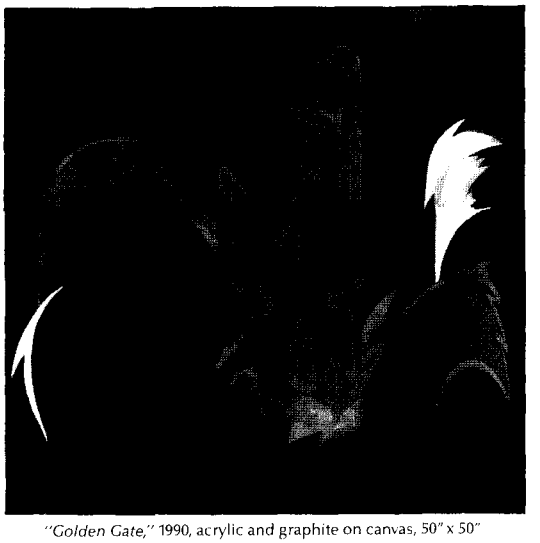

"Golden Gate," 1990, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 50" x 50"

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From East Hill/Wash

B. Krigstein

BERNARD KRIGSTEIN
(1919–1990)

Nature and Man

March 15–26, 1991

Daily 1–5

WESTBETH GALLERY

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RUBINOFF

Jeffrey Rubinoff
Studio, Hornby Island,
B.C., Canada V0R 1Z0
(604) 335-0668

Tofino #1 1985
Cor-ten plate
Height 7'3"

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